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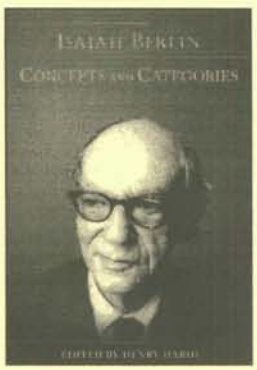

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SPRING 1999

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OUTSTANDING SCHOLARSHIP

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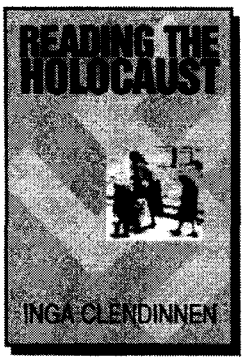

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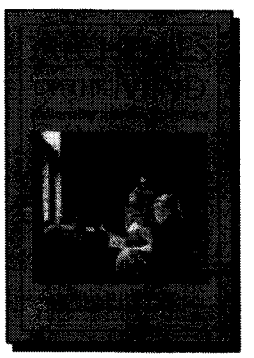
Jon Elster



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LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

Family Secrets

Last fall, I received a call from the art historian James Trilling. "I have written a reminiscence of my family," he said. "I do not wish to make a profession of being the son of the Trillings, and this is the only article I plan to write about them." He then asked me whether I would have any objections to publishing a rather long piece whose central theme was attention deficit disorder. I didn't. Several of my friends have ADD and, although I'm aware that some people view the disorder with skepticism, I have never doubted either its existence or its organic basis, which most behavioral geneticists now consider to be as well-established as that of schizophrenia.

I should interject here that the Trillings have been part of our family lore for a very long time. My father introduced Lionel Trilling to his future wife, Diana, at a Manhattan speakeasy in 1927; my brother, under the racy pseudonym "X," was the subject of a chapter in Diana Trilling's 1977 book, *We Must March My Darlings.* When Jim mentioned attention deficit disorder, I assumed the sufferer must have been his mother, whose phobias were well known. After his essay arrived, I found that I had guessed wrong. According to Jim, he had ADD, his father had had it, and he suspected that his grandfather had had it too.

I had never read anything quite like "My Father and the Weak-Eyed Devils." It was angry in parts, but never vengeful; it was eloquent; it marshaled its evidence scrupulously. I learned that it was the only first-person essay Jim had ever written, that it had taken him more than six months, and that the process had been painful.

"I knew that I had to write something almost as soon as I figured out my father had had ADD," Jim told me. "That was more than ten years ago. But I knew I couldn't publish it during my mother's lifetime. After she died, I thought I would write a short, simple piece. The further I got, the more I realized how complicated, and how exhausting, it was going to be to set the record straight. The emotional turmoil was considerable. But to my surprise, when I finished, I found that it had accomplished what I had hoped for. It let out much of the pressure I had built up from my bewildering childhood. It carried out my desire to perform a service for other people with ADD by showing that an intellectual leader could have it. And it enabled me, twenty-five years after his death, to understand my father much better than I ever did when he was alive."

A. F.

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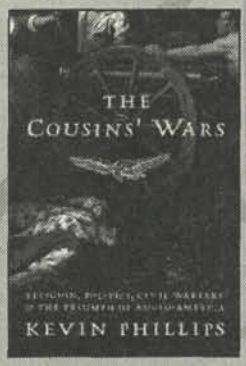

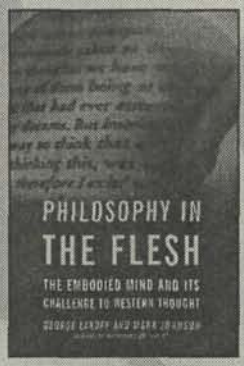

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AT LARGE AND AT SMALL

What Do You Know?

ARTHUR KRYSTAL

Emerging from the lobby of the Metropolitan Opera House one evening, I overheard one middle-aged operagoer ask another, "Have you heard of a writer named Tolstoy, he was Russian?" I didn't catch the reply because I had come to a full stop, and by the time my mouth closed, the men had disappeared. I related the incident to a few friends and then forgot about it. Some months later I heard myself saying that it was probably unnecessary to identify the author of *The Sorrows of Young Werther* in the pages of a national magazine. The magazine's associate editor disagreed. When I suggested that most people know who wrote the novel, she replied testily that *she* didn't know. Empathic to a fault, I got the feeling that she didn't care for me or for the implication that she should have known.

A touchy subject, knowledge. Conceptually, it is almost impossible to define; and as a practical matter, a condition of factual awareness, what constitutes core or essential knowledge? Just what is it we're supposed to know? "Now, what I want is Facts," insists the schoolmaster Thomas Gradgrind in *Hard Times*. "Teach these boys and girls nothing but Facts. Plant nothing else, and root out everything else. . . . In this life, we want nothing but Facts, sir; nothing but Facts."

There, I have just summoned the ghost of two more facts: the author of *Hard Times* (Charles Dickens) and his low opinion of pedagogy in the person of Gradgrind. Should you have known this? Deep thinking or high imagining is not required to answer. Like Gradgrind, I want the facts, or more precisely the data that I'm responsible for knowing. "Just the facts," Jack Webb rapped out on *Dragnet* (an allusion that opens a whole new can of facts).

Ten years ago, E. D. Hirsch, Jr., assisted by science writer James Trefil and historian Joseph Kett, published *Cultural Literacy: What Every American Needs to Know*. The book, reprinted many times, includes an updated appendix of "5,000 essential names, phrases, dates, and concepts" that Trefil identified as "What Literate Americans Know." Arranged alphabetically—*Robert's Rules of Order;* Robeson, Paul; Robinson, Jackie; rob Peter to pay Paul; rococo; Rodgers and Hammerstein—the items, to say the least, make an eclectic group. Despite my harrumphing over a few of these "essential" facts (why Bizet, Georges, but not Berlioz, Hector?), I have no problem with the list, since the authors go out of their way to stress its provisional nature. The list is *descriptive* rather than *prescriptive* (their italics), illustrating the range and character of knowledge, not its beginning or end.

Where do the items come from? Apparently they are culled from the general print media, where they appear without explanation, leading Hirsch to suppose that they represent "the information actually possessed by literate Americans." Hirsch tends to refer to these facts as background knowledge or wide-ranging background information or, more pointedly, as the *shared* knowledge of literate Americans. He also believes this background knowledge to be "necessary for functional literacy and effective national communication." Well, yes, but isn't there something pat in this shifting from what every American should know to what literate Americans actually do know? Not only am I not persuaded that every American

---

Arthur Krystal edited Jacques Barzun's *The Culture We Deserve*. His most recent contribution to the SCHOLAR, "H.C. Witwer and Me," appeared in the Spring 1998 issue. Philonoë, the regular proprietor of "At Large and At Small," will resume her columnar duties with the Summer issue.

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should know what's on the list, I am not so sure that the list really suggests what most literate Americans do know.

Cultural Literacy received the glowing (some might say glowering) endorsement of former Secretary of Education William Bennett and other conservative pundits. Properly gratified, Hirsch also knew that such august benediction could put liberals off the book's thesis, which, in brief, finds a net loss in shared knowledge. If Hirsch is right to fret over this knowledge drain, he is rather optimistic in putting so much stock in what education may ultimately achieve. Functional literacy and effective national communication are no guarantors of decency or moral rectitude. Indeed, it strikes me that if the argument needs to be made, the cause is already lost. When Matthew Arnold defined culture as "a pursuit of our total perfection by means of getting to know, on all the matters which most concern us, the best which has been thought and said in the world," he was not bringing a new idea into the world, nor was he proselytizing for universal education. He was simply reminding his readers of what they already knew: knowledge helps people to live. When Hirsch says much the same thing, a whiff of desperation clings to the page.

This brings me to the subtext of Hirsch's thesis, a troubling component of general ignorance that Hirsch seems reluctant to say out loud. Namely: many people today couldn't care less about not knowing things. Information, if not pertinent to life or career, simply doesn't matter to most people. You can't argue with the facts, but you can ignore or dismiss them. People do. In point of fact, there is a growing resistance to facts: from boardrooms to cocktail bars, educated and well-read people, people who would characterize themselves as informed, are simply unrepentant about not knowing things that do not reflect their interests. No one is claiming that ignorance is bliss, but few are apologizing for it. Indeed, ignorance of facts has taken on the neutrality of fact itself, sloughing off any stigma of intellectual abdication.

I dwell on this because it doesn't jibe with what I remember. Thirty years ago, when I unpacked my bags at a large midwestern university, the classroom was not yet neutral ground where teachers were loath to demand results or to discipline the unprepared. If my own trepidation reflected a wider anxiety, difficult questions were like flares that lit up the inattentive or benighted and left them squirming in their seats. More to the point, a rough or disadvantaged childhood didn't get you off the hook. Sure, there were reasons for gaps in one's education, but gaps they were. Ignorance could be explained, ignorance could even be justified, but—and this is a "but" that throbs with portent—ignorance was wrong. Somewhere along the line, you had slipped through the system; it may not have been your fault, but the ultimate responsibility was yours.

So what happened between then and now? Whence came the defiance required to face down facts, to regard with impunity what formerly was part of a traditional humanities education? A number of possible explanations come to mind: the decline of literacy; the ascendancy of technology; the recondite nature of modern science and the increasing specialization of all disciplines, including the humanities; the fall of the public intellectual and "man of letters"; the difficulty of texts that seek to explain why reading is so darned difficult; the popularization (and concomitant simplification) of "great" writers; and the fact that many educators have no problem with putting quotation marks around the word *great,* even when referring to Shakespeare.

Other suspects may be hauled in and interrogated, but the underlying cause, the shadowy perpetrator, remains at large. An intellectual attitude has no cause; it floats in, soft on the heels of a series of cultural events and trends, and becomes part of the regular interchange between school and society. Making a positive ID even more difficult is that the attitude in question is less transgressive than expressive. License not to know is not the same thing as rebelling against an existing body of knowledge (though the equation may exist retroactively). But if the cause is elusive, the effect is not. When was the last time someone saying "What, you never heard of so-and-so?" put you off your feed, made you feel a tad inadequate?

Inadequacy, of course, can be rectified; the real problem is knowing whether one actually

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is inadequate where knowledge is concerned. Express dismay that I don't know the title of the latest self-help book, the name of the hot new rock band, the CEO of some huge corporation, the capital of Mississippi, and my head remains high. Not my bailiwick, I respond cheerily. I don't need to know that.

Then again, I'm not entirely sure what I do need to know. I have a general idea, but if you ask me to outline the parameters of knowledge, I may start off briskly but in short order stumble, vacillate, hedge. Like most liberal arts majors, I have made my peace with the two cultures and figure that about 70 percent of scientific fact is outside my competence curve. But this still leaves a rather intimidating amount of information inside the arc. To narrow it further, let us assume that most people who consider themselves cultivated, if that word still has currency, equate knowledge with recognizing significant historical individuals, trends, and events. While business, science, economics, mathematics, engineering, and law are not to be sneezed at, the pervasive impression exists that these subjects by themselves do not have the intellectual cachet associated with art, literature, music, and history.

Now we're getting somewhere. Or are we? The implication that knowing the historical highlights confers real knowledge on anyone would find little support in the academic community. The very idea of highlights—a string of books, artworks, events, and ideas, the nucleus of the traditional liberal arts education—has been under attack for just about the number of years that I have been out of school. Western Civilization courses (a.k.a. "From Plato to NATO") are shriveling up under the sanctimonious glare of Cultural Studies. In many cases, the study of the Great Books (and Great Individuals) has been supplemented or even supplanted by the study of the more "ordinary" lives, works, and occupations of hitherto unrecognized people.

In the postmodern classroom, knowledge itself has undergone a bizarre makeover. Once associated with the mental constructs either innate or issuing from data presented by the senses, knowledge with a capital *K* now smacks of elitism, bounded by cultural exigencies and manipulated by those with the power to do so—that is, those pesky privileged dead white European males. Students are urged to get hip to what "knowledge" and "culture" really signify: the power struggle between classes, races, and sexes. Who is privileged to call the shots, to decide what's important to know and what is not? In other words, you don't have to know what a liberal elitist cabal has shoved down your throat.

If you buy into this, you are free to pick and choose among whatever does not offend. Or—if you know something about the ways of academia—you can take this "dissing" of knowledge with a grain of salt and continue, guilt-free, to believe that civilization in the West, as in the East, presents a chain of events, consisting of both word and deed, the interpretation of which is fluid, but without which one cannot begin to understand how the end of the second millennium came to have the shape and temper it has. In which case you have no choice but to learn, commit to memory, and juggle the facts as you find them. Despite what theory-minded professors advocate, what we are talking about is *more* information, not radically different information, and despite the impediment of theory, anyone with a strong stomach for thick linguistic stew can digest Adorno, Foucault, Derrida, Lacan, and Bakhtin just as readers once had to swallow Kant, Hegel, Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty, et al.

So have we come to an understanding of the parameters of knowledge? Hardly. Knowledge is an odd business, dependent on our expectations and biases. That someone does not know Tolstoy seems like a pretty astonishing lapse to me. But consider *who* did not know: a middle-aged white individual attending an opera in New York City. Had the speaker been a twenty-year-old African-American sitting on a stoop in Harlem, or a small-town garage attendant in Kansas, would I have been surprised? No more so than many college teachers around the country whose incoming freshman classes, with the exception of a few enterprising self-starters, have never heard of Homer or Dante.

As for the college-educated editor unaware of *Werther*'s creator—well, why should she have known? Goethe has as much relevance to her as Hecuba had to Hamlet's friend the player. (Does the name *Hecuba* ring any bells?) At some

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point, the quick recall of untrammeled facts degenerates into entertainment, a contest, a way of earning money on *Jeopardy.* But that does not invalidate the knowledge to be gained from a liberal arts education. Whether such knowledge will greatly benefit society, as Hirsch and Company believe, or close the division between the intellectual haves and have-nots is a question for someone else to answer.

My own sense of things is that while the chasm between those with an education and those whom society has hindered from getting one has certainly been bridged, with access to knowledge now open to all classes and ethnic groups, the outcome is still less than perfect. Nothing like a uniform education exists for all those who seek to learn, and far too many college graduates emerge speaking different languages, even within the humanities. When one person's intellectual bread and butter is another person's arcana, something is wrong. If the syllables "Tol-stoy" elicit no recognition, what vast regions of literary blankness must lie outside our centers of learning?

The trick, of course, is to determine the set of cultural facts that educated people can agree on. But how does one go about planning the itinerary? The very thought is enough to make us pull up, because when you get down to it, this is nothing more than a whistle-stop tour of the high points. Undeterred, the expatriate critic George Steiner warned back in 1965: "Not to know Melville or Rimbaud, Dostoyevsky or Kafka, not to have read Mann's *Doktor Faustus* or Pasternak's *Doctor Zhivago* is a disqualification so severe from the notion of a vital literacy that we must raise, if not answer, the entire question of whether the close study of one literature makes good sense."

Readers of the SCHOLAR may find Steiner's exhortation perfectly sound; then again, some may balk at having to read *Doktor Faustus.* Or one may agree with Steiner in principle but decide that "a vital literacy" can be achieved without learning another language or even reading *Doctor Zhivago* in translation. A vital literacy, like knowledge itself, is not to be conveniently framed. We may know (sort of) where it begins: the Bible, Plato, Chaucer, Shakespeare, Milton—but where does it end? Pythagoras is a familiar name, but what of Protagoras? One may have read Goethe and Schiller, but not Klopstock. Or Kleist. Or Landor. Or Cowley. Sooner or later, a name, a book, a historical fact will blindside you, and you may well wonder, "Should I have known that?"

Calling attention to the signposts that might let us proceed further, Edward Hirsch has marshaled his five thousand facts, and more recently Harold Bloom's *The Western Canon* arrived flourishing not one but four "appendixes" of canonical authors and their works. A sampling of Bloom's essential writers includes Snorri Sturluson, Tirso de Molina, Samuel Daniel, George Etherege, Maurice Scève, John Galt, Adalbert Stifter, Trumbull Stickney, and Jones Very. I don't know about you, but my ego is doing a little stutter step trying to recover its balance.

True, one can walk safely into most faculty lounges sans John Galt, but to take comfort in this is to exhibit the same defensive posture adopted by the editor who didn't know (and didn't care) who had written *The Sorrows of Young Werther.* In light of Hirsch's descriptive items and Bloom's prescriptive list, one has to wonder if there is a rung on the intellectual ladder from which we can look around and maintain that we know enough. Is it enough to have read, say, four or five novels by Balzac and not the entire oeuvre? Is it okay to know the name John Galsworthy without having plowed through *The Forsyte Saga?* Do you move up a rung if you saw it on PBS? At what point does familiarity with a subject turn into expertise?

A rather prosaic phenomenon attends a person's own cache of knowledge. One's regard for, one's opinion of, certain facts depends pretty much on whether they are already part of one's repertoire. Did I know the name Thomas De Quincey? someone asked me recently. I did, as it happens, and thought the questioner, a former English major, should have known as well. Why did I feel this way? Because De Quincey's *Confessions of an English Opium-Eater* has been in my memory bank for twenty-five years, that's why.

Coming across an unfamiliar tidbit, our initial response is often: Well, how important can this person, event, or book be if *I* haven't heard of it? The worst offenders are those who have a passing acquaintance with books, who have read a lot and *think* they have read a lot. Someone like me, for example. And it is pre-

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cisely people like me who need to get their faces slapped once in a while with names or facts we have never heard of and whose existence others regard as self-evident.

Leafing through a copy of the *Times Literary Supplement,* I came across a review of *The Correspondence of Thomas Warton,* edited by David Fairer. I didn't know the first thing about Thomas Warton and, naturally, knowing nothing, I felt that it was all right not to know. Hey, if Warton were important, I'd already know all about him, wouldn't I? It gets worse. As I scanned the review, by one David Wormersley, I learned that Warton was Professor of Poetry at Oxford (1757–1767), Poet Laureate (1785), and the first historian of English literature. Bad enough as it is that I didn't know this guy, I also had to read Wormersley's casual aside that the "conclusion of [Dr.] Johnson's letter to Warton of December 21, 1754, in which he expressed his enduring sense of bereavement after the death of his wife two years before, is well known." Well known, huh? Then, after quoting the relevant part of the letter, Wormersley comments: "Most will have read this passage in the editions of Johnson's letters by Chapman, and, more recently, Redford."

The assumption is staggering if Wormersley, a Fellow of Jesus College, Oxford, believes he is addressing a generally literate audience, as opposed to specialists in eighteenth-century studies. I'm not sure what percentage of *TLS* readers know the name of Thomas Warton or could tell you much, if anything, about him. But that is me speaking—that is, a person for whom Warton could not be terribly important because he knew nothing about him. Wormersley would find me woefully, culpably ignorant—and he would be right.

Having now learned a little about Warton, I imagine that he had few doubts about what constituted a vital literacy. Warton lived in a century when a man of learning in one thing was a man of learning in all things, when a consummate familiarity with all that had been written and thought was considered both a proper and a reasonable goal. Indeed, at the beginning of the eighteenth century, the French economist A. R. J. Turgot claimed that it was possible to discern "every shade of barbarism and refinement . . . every step taken by the human mind, the likeness of every stage through which it has passed." Such confidence was, of course, made possible by an educational system in which a clearly defined set of cultural standards held sway. An aspiring scholar didn't choose what to learn; he simply made his way to the common source, the Book—from which all knowledge flowed—and drank as much as he could hold.

As for the argument that in Warton's time there was less to know—that intellectually speaking, things were on a smaller scale—how do we make a neat or manageable bundle of the social, religious, aesthetic, philological, and scientific schemes, doctrines, and speculations that were flourishing contemporaneously? In philosophy alone, Cartesianism, Berkeleian idealism, Kantean epistemology, Lockeian empiricism, and Humean skepticism caromed off one another even as they were being enlisted in the service of Orientalism, pietism, Newtonian mechanism, nationalism, and the place of *Volkspoesie* in society. A dense forest of facts and ideas had sprung up in England, Germany, and France by the end of the eighteenth century, and yet the author of *Werther* felt no compunction about characterizing a person unable to give a complete accounting of the past three thousand years as someone who lived a superficial life, who lived, in fact, in darkness.

The problem, it bears repeating, is not so much one of difficulty as it is one of lowered expectations. Most people today don't think they know everything, but they probably feel they know what they're supposed to know. Scientist, lawyer, teacher, stockbroker, machinist, doctor, or editor—our hubris is such that each of us measures important knowledge by our portion of it. (Incidentally, the fellow who wrote that man is the measure of all things was Protagoras.) From within this self-imposed, self-enclosed intellectual habitat, one may regard the world of (others') knowledge with enviable disinterest.

Nor is scholarship itself immune from the feeling that there are restrictions on what is possible to know. In *Defenders of the Text,* Anthony Grafton marks the difference in how pre-Renaissance and post-Renaissance interpreters of classical literature went about their tasks. The Scholastics read by testing logical and rhetorical stresses and tensions, whereas

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Renaissance and Enlightenment humanists endeavored to understand the text from the perspective of the person who wrote it. The "serious effort to obtain that sort of knowledge," says Grafton, "became the first characteristically modern form of intellectual life. Such knowledge, moreover, lurked in the details of the ancient texts."

Details?—which details? Scholars studying the work of forgotten scholars were probably not troubled by such a piddling question. Nevertheless, once it emerged that there was something or some things that *were supposed* to be known in order to understand what happened, knowledge became problematic. Indeed, in the very claims made for a complete accounting, one might discern the first stirring of doubt as to the efficacy of such an undertaking. New facts have a way of turning up and turning into more facts: important, verging on important, trivial. The more degrees and gradations of knowledge we recognize, the more potential facts swim into our ken; influences and relationships multiply, and the whole thing soon becomes ridiculously complicated. How can we possibly know everything when we can't be sure what should be known?

To ask the question does not necessarily mean that the search is futile. To put it bluntly, the course of human events has been shaped by art, anatomy, religion, politics, science, geography, exploration, trade, accident, and catastrophe. Some men and some women, some inventions, some events, some works of literature and art have had a greater impact than others. Why say otherwise? There is, after all, a forceful distinction to be made between not knowing Copernicus and Columbus and being a scholarly pig snuffling for intellectual truffles. The possession of knowledge does not depend on the ability to recognize *every* person or event, but on the awareness that it requires a foundation on which the ladder may start. Or we may read the story of mankind as rings of growth in a tree, or layers of wash on a rock, with speckles of color showing through successive rings or coats, some fading, others reappearing.

Disputing the idea that the dead writers are remote from us because we know so much more than they did, T. S. Eliot famously countered: "Precisely, and they are that which we know." I'm not so sure. With the exception of a few noted men of letters, we do not know the dead writers, and if we do, it's a toss-up whether we know more than they did. Whenever I go back to Montaigne, Robert Burton, and Samuel Johnson, it occurs to me that they knew more then than I do now, despite my knowing them.

As the past recedes and the dead writers stay dead, it and they become less real, less essential somehow, and their remoteness seems to be accelerating (if such a thing is possible) at an alarming pace. Not only has high culture been knocked off its pedestal, the pedestal itself has been kicked aside. It's not simply that the canon has been deracinated; what really distinguishes the last few decades is the reversal of numbers between the old facts and the new, between the classic and the contemporary. Increasingly, more of the new is being required, and less of the old. John Dryden hasn't been dropped in favor of John Milton; both are dropped to make room for Stephen King.

No offense to Mr. King, but is there any good reason I should know his name in the name of education? For that matter, there are many things I now know that I'd just as soon not—the names L. Ron Hubbard, John Wayne Bobbitt, Howard Stern, and Steely Dan; the words to half a dozen rock songs ("Hey, hey, you, you, get offa my cloud"); the salaries paid to certain basketball players; and a thousand other trivial odds and ends that the media as well as friends and acquaintances keep stuffing into my mental chamber.

Arthur Conan Doyle, in the voice of Sherlock Holmes, once likened the mind to an attic, a storeroom requiring the occasional clearing out in order to make room for more information. If that is the case, then what useful niche does Barbara Walters occupy? What important fact has she replaced or is she keeping out? Most likely the mental attic can comfortably hold all the junk we can lug up, but there is something to be said for deciding what is well made, well thought out, or notable in the story of mankind, and thus best learned and best remembered.

Ignorance may not be a sin, but it isn't defensible either. One can be jaunty as hell about what one doesn't know, but does this

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suggest anything but a temperamental disinclination toward learning? Indifference doesn't cut it as a justifiable attitude; it's part of the same defensiveness characteristic of educators for whom knowledge is not beholden to arbitrary standards established by dead white European males. Nor does a changing parade of significance exempt one from learning about those individuals or works that bring up the rear.

The objections to this unreconstructed approach to learning are as obvious as they are predictable. Yes, things *are* more complicated than I've made them out to be; and yes, there is an awful lot to read, and it is not always clear which books have the best claim on our attention. All the same, you have to begin somewhere, and provided that you bring along intellectual curiosity and a willingness to trip up every so often, it doesn't take long to realize that information overload and specialization do not constitute insurmountable obstacles. If you don't know something, fine. Lacunae may be excused (in fact, they're to be expected), but not the attitude that fosters them. In truth, no one wears ignorance well. It's like going out with holes in your clothes. There's nothing plucky or smart or politically correct about not knowing the facts—any facts.

Despite the lengthening and broadening of history, each generation continues to toss up its share of polymaths, those on whom nothing, or very little, of a bookish nature is lost. Milton was supposedly such a person, as were Goethe and his contemporary Alexander von Humboldt. William James, who knew a thing or two, noted that the German scientist Ernst Mach seemed to know everything. In our own day, the science writer Jeremy Bernstein speculated that the physicist Freeman Dyson knew more about everything than he, Bernstein, knew about any one thing. Joseph Epstein, the former editor of this magazine, felt much the same way about the historian Arnaldo Momigliano; and it would appear from the breadth of their writings that such cultural historians as Jacques Barzun and the late Isaiah Berlin seem to have read everything that ever mattered to scholars.

The exceptions here prove no rule except the one concerning hard work, though perhaps they do suggest that a rough consensus is possible. Lists, indices, appendices are hardly the point, since putting a spotlight on certain facts leaves other facts in the shadows. What is required is respect for knowledge, a respect not contingent upon institutional criteria or expectations, but earned by intellectual grit. You must press on, you must keep learning; otherwise how will you ever realize that you have to know a lot before you can know how much you really don't know?

Not a bad goal: educated ignorance. It is but a mild paradox, one in which a healthy regard for intellectual attainment instills a proper humility before knowledge in general. It comes down to attitude. People must take it as a matter of faith that it is better to be curious about what one doesn't know than it is to be complacent about what one does know. So let's put shame back in the curriculum. Better for students and people in all walks of life to feel abashed when unable to recognize a name, title, date, or concept than to offer excuses for not knowing. Although one may have cause not to know, there is no good reason for remaining in the dark.

George Orwell said somewhere (I should try to find out where) that by the time a man reaches the age of fifty, he has acquired the face he deserves. One might add that he will also be playing, more or less, with the same intellectual deck of cards for the rest of his life. One doesn't have to be a keeper of the intellectual flame to exhibit a healthy regard for facts. One doesn't have to be a brain, an egghead, or a nerd to accept that no fact is too trivial until it's been examined. In other words, one ought to know enough not to draw any conclusions about what is enough to know.

So should the opera-goer have heard of Tolstoy? Should the editor have known who wrote *Werther?* Should I have been acquainted with Thomas Warton? Of course.

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School prayer . . . bears about as much resemblance to real spiritual experience as that freeze-dried astronaut food bears to a nice standing rib roast.

—ANNA QUINDLEN
The New York Times, *December 7, 1994*

I laid down in the bottom of the boat, and resigned myself to reflection; my silent prayers were offered up to the God of mercy, for that protection which we stood so much in need of. Sometimes, indeed, a light hope would dawn, but then, to feel such an utter dependence on and consignment to chance alone for aid and rescue, would chase it again from my mind. The wreck—the mysterious and mortal attack of the animal—the sudden prostration and sinking of the vessel—our escape from her, and our then forlorn and almost hapless destiny, all passed in quick and perplexing review in my imagination; wearied with the exertion of the body and mind, I caught, near morning, an hour's respite from my troubles, in sleep.

—OWEN CHASE
Narrative of the Most Extraordinary and Distressing Shipwreck of the Whale-Ship *Essex* of Nantucket, *1821*

COMMONPLACE BOOK

Prayer

COLLECTED BY
ANDRÉ BERNARD

The external must be joined to the internal to obtain anything from God, that is to say, we must kneel, pray with the lips, etc., in order that proud man, who would not submit himself to God, may now be subject to the creature. To expect help from these externals is superstition; to refuse to join them to the internal is pride.

—BLAISE PASCAL
Pensées, *1670*

At times the very first words tear my thoughts from my body and transport it to a place where there is neither perspective nor point of view. The infinity of the ordinary expanses of perception is replaced by an infinity to the second or sometimes third degree. At the same time, filling every part of this infinity of infinity, there is silence, a silence which is not an absence of sound but which is the object of a positive sensation, more positive than that of sound. Noises, if there are any, only reach me after crossing this silence.

—SIMONE WEIL
on the Lord's Prayer, 1951

He told me to be friendly to people and never to steal or lie about anything. . . . He said that someday I would have a home of my own and I should always have lots of wood to cook food with. At that time they prayed for wood, because it helped to prepare food for them and it kept them warm. He told me always to give blessings for food and to be thankful for my home.

—JIM WHITEWOLF
on his grandfather, in The Life of a Kiowa Apache Indian, *1878*

Some people have food but no appetite; others have appetite but no food. I have both. The Lord be praised.

—OLIVER CROMWELL
prayer of grace before meals

We make requests of our fellow creatures as well as of God: we ask for the salt, we ask for a raise in pay, we ask a friend to feed the cat while we are on holidays, we ask a woman to marry us. Sometimes we get what we ask for and sometimes not. But when we do, it is not nearly as easy as one might suppose to prove with scientific certainty a causal connection between the asking and the getting.

—C.S. LEWIS
"The Efficacy of Prayer," 1959

Prayers for rain should not be offered just before the season for rain.

—THE TALMUD
(Ta'anit), c. 200

At a certain time when on the holy day of Easter the king [Oswald] with the bishop were set down to dinner, and a silver dish replenished with princely dainties was set on the table before him, and they were now on the point of

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putting forth their hands to bless the bread, suddenly there entered in his officer to whom was committed the charge to relieve the needy, and told the king that a very great number of poor people arriving from all places did sit in the public ways, desiring some alms from the king; who by and by gave commandment that the delicacies which were set before his own person should be bestowed on the poor, and moreover the dish of silver be broken and by piecemeal parted among the same. At the sight whereof the bishop set by the king, being delighted with such an act of goodness, took him by the right hand, and said: "May this hand never wax old." Which thing came ever so to pass. . . . For whereas, after that the king was slain in battle (his hands, with his arms being cut off from the residue of his body), it happened that his hands to this day continue uncorrupted.

—THE VENERABLE BEDE
Ecclesiastical History of the English Nation, *c. 735 (1565 trans.)*

But nothing in the World would so discompose [the Goodwin children] as a Religious Exercise. . . . All Praying to God, and Reading of His word, would occasion a very terrible Vexation to them: they would stop their own Ears with their own Hands; and roar, and shriek; and holla, to drown out the Voice of Devotion. Yea, if anyone in the Room took up a Bible to look into it, tho the Children could see nothing of it, as being in a crowd of Spectators, or having their Faces another way, yet would they be in wonderful Miseries, till the Bible were laid aside.

—COTTON MATHER
Memorable Providences, Relating to Witchcraft and Possessions, *1689*

I forgot about the world outside the monastery and devoted myself to my studies. I memorized more and more texts [of prayers]. I had a good incentive to work hard, because I had noticed that illiterate or lazy monks ended up with the lowliest duties. I found memorizing very hard, though some students accomplished it effortlessly. Whenever a student had memorized a particular text, his teacher would ask the abbot to allow the novice to recite the entire text in front of the assembly. This was pretty terrifying. After the daily liturgy, the young monk would stand in front of the assembly and recite his text. I had to do this several times and I remember the silence in the hall, broken only by the slurping of tea.

—PALDEN GYATSO
The Autobiography of a Tibetan Monk, *1997*

I wish [faith] were more productive of Good Works than I have generally seen it: I mean real Good Works, Works of Kindness, Charity, Mercy, and Publick Spirit; not Holiday-Keeping, Sermon-Reading or Hearing, performing Church Ceremonies, or making long Prayers, filled with Flatteries and Compliments, despis'd even by Wise Men, and much less capable of pleasing the Deity. The Worship of God is a Duty, the hearing and reading of Sermons may be useful; but if Men rest in Hearing and Praying, as too many do, it is as if a Tree should value itself on being water'd and putting forth Leaves, tho' it never produced any Fruit.

—BENJAMIN FRANKLIN
letter to Joseph Huey, June 6, 1753

The wish to talk to God is absurd. We cannot talk to one we cannot comprehend—and we cannot comprehend God; we can only believe in Him. The uses of prayer are thus only subjective.

—IMMANUEL KANT
lecture at Königsberg, 1775

What the people especially wanted, they told us, was a new prayer for caribou. Three years before, they said, they had obtained an excellent prayer for caribou from Kotzebue Sound. It had worked so well for the first two years that they had secured plenty of caribou through the use of it, not only during the summer season when the skins are good for clothing, but also (so efficient was the prayer) during the winter, when under ordinary circumstances they would not have been able to get any. But this year the prayer did not seem to be working so well. They supposed that white men's prayers, like their rifles and other things, no doubt deteriorated with age, and now they were anxious to secure a new and more efficient prayer.

—VILHJÁLMUR STEFÁNSSON
My Life With the Eskimo, *1913*

O God, help our side, and if you can't, then at least don't help those scoundrels.

—PRINCE LEOPOLD OF ANHALT-DESSAU
prayer before the battle of Kesseldorf, 1745

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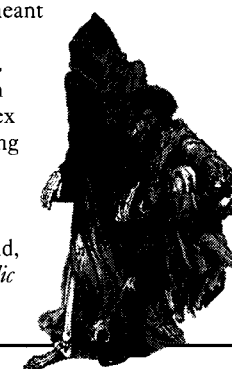

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My Father and the Weak-Eyed Devils

JAMES TRILLING

My father, Lionel Trilling, never told the story of his life. He waited too long, not guessing how little time he had left. Cancer drained away his physical and mental strength, and only a few jottings testify to the memoir he longed to write. I have trouble imagining the kind of book it might have been. My father rarely spoke to me of himself. Although he was happy to share his intellectual enthusiasms, he never told me how he came to think as he did. His great professional disappointment was that he ended up writing so little fiction: that much I always knew. As for the more personal choices and necessities that made him who he was, he never spoke of them at all. The past had closed in behind him, and the future opened only from moment to moment. I cannot picture him setting down his hopes and fears, even the most cerebral ones, for strangers to read.

If my father was an introspective man, it was in the old sense of the word, before it became hopelessly confused with public self-revelation. In particular, his lifelong commitment to psychoanalysis, not just as an interpreter but as a patient, suggests a dogged willingness to understand himself. Dogged, because he apparently never hoped for glamorous insights or a decisive cure. He believed that people always had, and always would have, unconscious motives in direct conflict with their conscious ones.

James Trilling is an art historian in Providence, Rhode Island, who specializes in Byzantine art and the history of ornament. His articles have appeared in such journals as *Dumbarton Oaks Papers, Arte Medievale,* the *Yale Review, Common Knowledge,* and the *International Journal of Politics, Culture and Society*. He is the author of *Ornament: A Modern Perspective,* forthcoming from the University of Washington Press, and is also completing a volume on ornament for the Thames and Hudson World of Art Series.

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Psychoanalysis, in his view, could not end the conflict; the most it could do was point the way to a somewhat less abrasive relation to oneself and others. For my father, its symbolic value probably equaled its value as therapy: it was a reminder not to let his guard down, or set his sights too high. I admire his honesty, but whether he saw analysis primarily as a medical treatment or as a path to self-knowledge, by lowering his expectations it may have kept him from more practical help. My father's worst problem was not neurosis, it was a neurological condition, attention deficit disorder.

With hindsight, I can see that the failure to recognize medical problems was a recurring theme in my parents' lives. Disorders of the mind cast a shadow over both of them, skewing their vision, absorbing their energy, and setting capricious limits on their pleasures and achievements. My mother, Diana Trilling, acknowledged this in her memoir, *The Beginning of the Journey*, yet neither she nor my father seems to have cared, though they knew it in the abstract, that medical practice was giving these disorders familiar names, and often an etiology and treatment if not a cure. Above all, it was their allegiance to Freud that discouraged them from seeking medical answers when psychological ones, however tortuous, would serve. Although psychoanalysis meant very different things to them, for both my parents it was linked to personal accountability. They disliked the idea that mental states can have physical causes: it took individual behavior out of the control of the individual.

I do not mean that they rejected neurology or psychiatry out of hand, but they saw them as tools of doubtful efficacy, alarmingly invasive and reductive, valuable only as a last resort for patients whose disturbances had passed beyond the curative power of will and understanding, and for whom a medical invasion of the mind, however damaging to personal autonomy, was clearly better than nothing. A few months before his death, not yet knowing he had cancer, my father was seized by lassitude and misery. He reluctantly saw a psychiatrist, who spoke of antidepressant medication. My father was willing to undergo such treatment (as it turned out, he never had to, since the real nature of his illness was soon apparent), but his last letter to me is bitter about the prospect of "chemical cheerfulness."

It was not just their own undiagnosed disorders that shaped my parents' lives. My mother's sister, Celia, used to grimace and smack her lips while making convulsive yet deliberate grasping motions with her hands. Today this is recognizable as Tourette's syndrome, but my mother saw it as part of Celia's character, and its influence was catastrophic. Just as some people are simultaneously repelled and fascinated by apes as parodies of humanity, my mother was almost obsessed by Celia as a mockery of everything physical in personhood. She was the dark side of the body: aban-

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don unredeemed by pleasure, debility unredeemed by pain. Above all, she was a mockery of my mother herself. Celia was the older sister Diana was supposed to follow but whom she spent her whole life trying to leave behind—unsuccessfully, despite college, marriage, motherhood, and a distinguished career, none of which Celia had. My father responded to Celia in the same way. After first meeting them both, he wrote in his private notebook: "Her older sister is an ugly caricature of D. and I was frightened."

Celia did eventually marry, in a nursing home shortly before her death. The thought of the marriage sent my mother into paroxysms of anger and disgust. Part was simple envy, that Celia in all her decrepitude could find a husband, while Diana, a widow still in her early seventies, was condemned—self-condemned—to spend the rest of her life celibate. Even stronger was her rage at Celia for doing this *to her.* She believed that Celia's marriage had but one purpose in the grand scheme of things: to travesty and defile her own. Only recently have I understood how much our style as a family, the physical aloofness and refusal to unbend, owed to my mother's (and probably my father's) need to shut out everything that was Celia.

My mother's affliction was panic disorder with agoraphobia, which made her an emotional cripple for many years, beginning shortly after her marriage. Although her memoir contains a vivid account of the disorder's onset, she seems never to have achieved enough distance to examine it objectively. After her first full-blown panic attack, in 1931, she consulted a neurologist, who asked what motives she might have for such behavior. Although the question took her by surprise, she was able to answer without hesitation that she wanted to be more dependent on Lionel than he was on her. My mother had scarcely heard of Freud, but if the scene took place as she told it, she scarcely needed him: her predisposition to seek unconscious motives was already well established.

I do not know what resources of diagnosis and treatment were available then, or how different her life might have been if the doctor had asked some other question. What is beyond doubt is that she came to see her panic attacks in exclusively psychoanalytic terms, as aspects of a generalized "neurosis" or "hysteria." Time brought no change in this mode of awareness. Eventually a psychiatrist—not one of my mother's friends, but a stranger who had read *The Beginning of the Journey*—wrote to correct her use of outdated terms in what he said was otherwise a textbook-perfect description of panic disorder with agoraphobia. This was in September 1996. My mother was too ill to read the letter and died soon afterward. I am glad to have found it among her papers and equally glad that she never saw it. Her panic attacks had long since tapered off, but they had permanently shaped her personality. It would have humiliated her to see them reduced to a page in a diagnostic manual.

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By far the most insidious culprit in my family was attention deficit disorder, now commonly called ADD. It tends to run in families, especially in the male line. I have it, my father almost certainly had it, and in all likelihood his father had it too. ADD is often diagnosed in an adult when a troubled child is brought in to be tested. Hearing the symptoms described for the first time in clinical terms, a parent—usually the father—realizes that he has many of the same symptoms himself. My father missed his chance, and I made the discovery for him, long after his death.

Attention deficit disorder is a congeries of symptoms, to all appearances unrelated and sometimes contradictory. If there is a linking theme, it is the inability to maintain a productive level of concentration ("focus") through the normal range of daily activities. Lack of focus can show itself as a failure to do the right things or to keep from doing the wrong things. The symptoms are almost as diverse as the demands of life itself: hyperactivity, but also lethargy and daydreaming; procrastination, but also rushing into situations without thinking about rules and consequences; unwanted shifts of attention, as when a conversation overheard across the room suddenly drowns out everything else; unprovoked or disproportionate outbursts of temper; inability to plan ahead, stick to a task, or keep track of time; insensitivity to other people's unspoken needs; high-risk and thrill-seeking behavior; and obsessive cravings that are no sooner satisfied than they give way to others just as intense. The list goes on, and it is easy to see why many people see the individual symptoms as no more than weaknesses of character, and "attention deficit disorder" as a product of our collective self-indulgence, invented to disguise our failure to discipline ourselves and our children.

Most specialists agree that the medical understanding of ADD began in 1902. That is when George F. Still, a London pediatrician and medical historian, gave three lectures (published in *The Lancet* of that year) on what he called a "morbid defect of moral control" in children. Faced with a range of crippling disorders, from simple inability to concentrate to "stealing, lying, vicious [and] spiteful acts," Still was able to see that these apparently disparate symptoms flowed from a single source. He recognized that a failure of moral control need not be a failure of moral awareness; it can be a failure of will. Many of his patients knew the difference between right and wrong, but felt themselves in the grip of an "irresistible impulse" that kept them from translating their knowledge into action. Taking his cue from William James, who wrote in *The Principles of Psychology* that "the effort of attention is the essential phenomenon of will," Still saw failure of attention as the common denominator.

Some of Still's cases conform exactly to modern notions of ADD. For example, there was the six-year-old boy who "was unable to keep his attention even on a game for more than a very short time . . . with the

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result that in some cases the child was backward in school attainments, although in manner and ordinary conversation he appeared as bright and intelligent as a child could be." Other children exhibited serious antisocial tendencies, the kind we now associate less with ADD itself than with people whom ADD has already pushed to the margins of society. We should not set too much store by the distinction. Most of Still's case histories have the "flavor" of ADD to anyone familiar with the disorder, and it is important to remember that in a hospital setting Still saw a disproportionate number of dramatic cases, children whose behavior precluded a normal life and sometimes even endangered the lives of others.

What made Still's formulation a triumph of humanity as well as science was his ability to shift the emphasis from moral awareness to moral will, to attention, and finally, despite the moralistic temper of his time, to the physical basis of attention: "That there is not only a perversion of function in the higher nervous centers but an actual physical abnormality underlying the moral defect seems more than probable." Still did not understand how the abnormality worked or what caused it; even today researchers are not sure. But they are closing in on the explanation, and we know that Still was on the right track. Whether the symptoms are violent or merely unfocused, attention deficit disorder is a physical impairment of the moral will.

There is no suggestion that my father knew of Still's work. It would have fascinated him, but he would have recoiled from it as a threat to one of the pillars of his life. His commitment to the moral will was deep and puritanical, and Still's intuition of the physiological basis of impulse, or of the inability to resist an impulse, would have been a metaphysical nightmare to him. But ADD is a medical problem, not a metaphysical one. Drugs have been available to treat it since the 1930s. Knowledge of the disorder would have helped my father, just as it helped me years later. Now that he is beyond help, he is also beyond proof. The question of whether he had ADD has become both academic and technically insoluble, and there is always a risk of vulgarity in diagnosing the famous dead.

I judge the risk worth taking. Ailments that once scandalized, like alcoholism and chronic depression, now scarcely raise an eyebrow. ADD has yet to join them in the light of day. Some people simply do not "believe in" ADD, not least because it has gone so quickly from being almost unknown to being overdiagnosed, and has become a catchall label for rambunctious young boys. My mother was one of the unbelievers. I never told her what I had learned. It would have struck her as a self-serving evasion of reality, and would have made me as alien and degraded in her eyes as if I had joined a cult. Others are prepared to accept ADD as

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a medical condition, but only if it is patently disabling. For them, an ADD sufferer with a distinguished career is a contradiction in terms.

Not every alcoholic staggers through the streets blind drunk; not every ADD sufferer is unable to stay in school or hold down a job. Just as some people lead productive lives in spite of depression or alcoholism, so the right combination of talent, courage, and luck can tip the balance here too. There is even a formula for success. Those who are free to concentrate on one interesting piece of work at a time, with no distractions or demands on their long-term organizational ability, stand the best chance. It is a simple rule, but more likely to provoke laughter than sympathy: who would *not* do well under such conditions? Luckily for my father, life as a university teacher in the mid-twentieth century provided the very conditions he needed. His career was a triumph—to everyone but himself.

We were close intellectually, but never personally. I knew him as a wonderfully flexible and imaginative teacher who seemed compelled to use his imagination to hobble his flexibility. He saw the world as a practical and moral obstacle course, but it was the obstacles that fascinated him, not the ways around them. He loved to follow the path of *most* resistance, and where obstacles were lacking he turned all his ingenuity to inventing them.

One example remains especially vivid. In the early 1960s, Columbia College was abuzz with the news that students would be allowed for the first time to entertain female guests in their dormitory rooms. I was in my early teens at the time, so I was naturally interested and pleased, but my father thought it was a terrible idea. The issue as he saw it was not visiting privileges per se, but sex. Sexual activity, he argued, was a means of self-definition—crucially, a means of self-definition in opposition to authority. If sex wasn't subversive, it wasn't fun. More important, it lost its significance as a rite of passage. By opening the rooms to women, on however restricted a basis, Columbia was licensing its students to experiment sexually and even involving itself in their sexual lives by providing an "official" time and place. It had thus abandoned its proper role as an authority to be defied, and deprived its students of an important chance to rebel and grow.

I tried to uphold my father's view, but it did not survive a few conversations with older teenage friends, who saw nothing wrong with letting college students invite their girlfriends up for coffee. What has stayed with me is its perverse impracticality. If he had ever gone public with it, liberals would have pilloried him for opposing sexual freedom, and puritans would have been just as furious at his rationale, that furtiveness made sex sexier. Why couldn't he be simply for or against, just once, like everybody else?

I began to see that my father's love of complexity was really two inter-

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locking impulses: to have the best of all worlds without committing himself to any, and to imbue everyday life with high moral drama by always swimming against the current. Recognizing that his quixotic intellectualism was the measure not just of his subtlety, but also of his human awkwardness and distance, took longer. Some children assume a father must be remote and inaccessible, an unmoved mover. I was too innocent even to make that assumption. I took it for granted that he was warm and accessible and that we were as close as father and son could be. Not until his last years did it occur to me how much was missing from his life and from our relationship. I sensed that large areas of his personality were a façade, but only with the diagnosis of my own ADD could I start to understand what might have led him to build it the way he did. Only in the light of ADD does that particular façade make sense. That is why my relation to my father, my inferences about his ADD, and my own experience with the disorder are more than complementary. They are the same story.

My symptoms began around age four. I remember a fairly rapid descent into chaos. All of a sudden, trivial problems began escalating beyond what, even then, I knew was reasonable, culminating in wild fits of temper that left me wondering miserably why I had gone and spoiled everything. Over what must have been a period of months, these outbursts became the rule rather than the exception. Clearly they were my fault, in the sense that they were my doing, but I did not want to have them; they felt more like something happening to me than like the product of my own volition. The outbursts crystallized into a set of classic symptoms: rages, inability to stay on task, and as I grew older, procrastination, daydreaming, insatiable cravings, insensitivity, and disorganization.

My parents did what they could to bring "the problem" (as they mostly called it) under control. Practically speaking, this meant three and a half years in a special school and eleven years in what was then called child analysis, plus five years of regular analysis later on, when the disorder caught up with me again and I almost flunked out of Harvard in my freshman year. I remember my Cambridge analyst with the deepest respect and gratitude, but the fact remains that neither he nor anyone else ever told me I had a recognized neurological disorder for which avenues of treatment other than the "talking cure" were available.

It was only in my late thirties that I saw an article on ADD and realized it could have been written about me. The emphasis was on medication and its benefits, but at first I shrugged that off. The reminder of "chemical cheerfulness" was too strong, and in any case the discovery that I had been struggling against an illness, not just against my own unconscious, seemed to be its own reward. However, I found myself increasingly willing

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to explore medical options and, after consulting several doctors, began taking Ritalin (methylphenidate) under the supervision of a neurologist. I am told that Ritalin does not work well for everyone with ADD. It can have unpleasant side effects, or it may simply not do the job. In my case it was a spectacular success, the more remarkable for its subtlety. I have little if any sense of being "on medication," but it has become easier for me to start work, to keep from daydreaming, and to control my temper. The day-to-day effects are perceptible; the long-term effects have transformed my life.

It dawned on me that my father had had ADD soon after I recognized the disorder in myself. By the time my mother finished her memoir there was no doubt in my mind. In 1994, Mark Krupnick reviewed *The Beginning of the Journey* in *Salmagundi*, and I was struck by how close he came to guessing the truth. He wrote that in her desire to demythologize my father, my mother "peels away the image of poise and gentility to reveal a man feckless and inept." "We learn," Krupnick said accurately, "that Lionel was incompetent or merely comical at swimming, dancing, and driving a car. Mrs. Trilling also adduces his ineffectiveness in handling money and dealing with his publisher. . . . We read of a young man insufficiently dominating in relation to his wife and an older husband who disappoints her by failing to exercise the faculty leadership that might have been his during the student demonstrations at Columbia in 1968." There were "periodic depressions . . . punctuated five or six times a year by irrational rages in which he blamed her for all of his unhappiness," and there was "her husband's deep sense of failure, his at times excessive drinking." The verdict on my mother's verdict: "The complaint is basically the same from start to finish: Lionel wasn't much of a man."

Krupnick suspected my mother's motives in suddenly exposing a set of flaws she had long helped my father conceal. But beyond that, the flaws themselves clearly set Krupnick's teeth on edge. Individually, they were ugly or trivial or both. Collectively, they made no sense. If my mother had determined, for whatever reason, to "come clean" about her husband, this was an unsatisfying catalogue of crime.

In Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, the narrator says: "I've seen the devil of violence, and the devil of greed, and the devil of hot desire; but, by all the stars! they were strong, lusty, red-eyed devils, that swayed and drove men—men, I tell you." But he acknowledges another just as destructive, though far less glamorous, "a flabby, pretending, weak-eyed devil." If what my mother sought so unflinchingly to expose were Lionel Trilling's private devils, they were the flabby, weak-eyed sort. Far from adding a dimension, even a dimension of imperfection, to his humanity, they diminished it, and hers as well, in the most unedifying way. Anyone whose dark side added up to *this* could not have been much of a man.

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And anyone whose idea of honesty was to air these sordid little tidbits could not, it must have seemed, be much of a woman.

Both Mark Krupnick and my mother were right: he for recognizing that her accusations didn't make sense, she for knowing that they did. What neither had was the key, the one insight that would have resolved the conflict. *All my father's personality flaws, which continued to haunt my mother almost twenty years after his death, were symptoms of attention deficit disorder.* Any one of them might have hinted at it; together, I found them conclusive.

ADD calls up images of hyperactivity and distractibility: the child who cannot sit still in class, the person of any age who is unable to focus on a task long enough to complete it. Other symptoms span such a broad range, and look so different from each other, that it is easy to miss the connection, unless one remembers the underlying theme of *focus.* A recent book by Kate Kelly and Peggy Ramundo points out, for example, that an ADD sufferer can have "a distorted sense of how his body moves in space and in relation to other objects. . . . He might be unable to gauge the speed and direction of a ball in tennis or baseball games." I know the feeling all too well: no matter where in the field I looked or stood or ran, the ball was always somewhere else. My father's case was probably worse. My mother never tired of recounting how as a young man he would wear himself to a frazzle on the tennis court, always reacting too late and pursuing the ball with all his energy when it was hopelessly out of reach. This was meant as a funny story, but other stories were darker, with implications of physical danger to himself and others: how he swam unfailingly into the path of motorboats and, above all, how, when he finally learned to drive in his fifties, he never bothered to look in the mirror or to signal, but careened from lane to lane. (My mother had ways of making her displeasure known, even when she felt honor-bound to say nothing openly critical of her husband's performance in such a man-defining activity. My father sold the car and let his license expire after only a few years.)

His tendency to be "somewhere else" extended to his relations with other people. He is said to have praised the appearance of a woman he passed on the street, not realizing it was his own mother. One of our few family legends worthy of the name had him sitting at the counter of a coffee shop next to a man whose face he thought he knew. When the man greeted him, he played for time by asking, "And what are you up to these days?" "Oh," said the man, "I'm still president of Columbia." (Was there really a time when university presidents stopped for coffee at Chock Full O'Nuts?)

Finally, although my father was not tactless, he sometimes got carried away by a conversation and strayed onto what my mother considered thin ice. When this happened at a dinner party, she would try to warn him, if

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he was within reach, by kicking his leg under cover of the table. His response was always the same: he would stop, blink, look around with a confused expression, then say to her, "Why are you kicking me under the table?" As expressions of professorial absentmindedness, these quirks were an amusement to those who knew of them. ADD puts them in a different light. What my father lacked was not a memory for faces, but the breadth of focus that would have allowed him to associate a face with a person. My mother was right to fear that he might at any time bring up an awkward subject or reveal a confidence. Her mistake was in supposing that ordinary cues would recall him to full awareness. The forced shift of focus left him more uncomprehending than before.

The paradox of my father's life was not that its public and private aspects were so different, but that so many people refused to see the difference. He was unspontaneous, uneasy with strong emotions, and hard to know. Out in the world he was private to the point of secretiveness. Yet he inspired a devotion that went far beyond respect for his work. The air of reserve and polite superiority by which he kept the world at a distance somehow achieved the opposite effect and made people feel they knew him. At the very least they took it for the emanation of a deeply admirable character. The magic didn't always work, and some people scorned my father for pretending to be English (his mother *was* English). Nevertheless, by the middle of his career his manner was widely taken as a sign of Apollonian detachment and wisdom. Writing or speaking, his was not just a critical voice among many; it was the voice of the Whole Man.

He could never have sustained this persona without my mother's help. Help is hardly the word for it: she took over the practical side of his life. Although in the early days of their marriage they squandered her very substantial inheritance, she matured into the most careful of household managers, far beyond what was expected of a wife even in those days. No one saw my father trying desperately to cope with the responsibilities of daily life, because he never had to. No one saw his life fall apart through inattention, because it never did. He had many practical anxieties, the most persistent of which were about money, but he kept them off the public stage. Although he always worked with an eye to the next month's rent, he conveyed the serenity of a man who is free to tackle the big questions because he takes his logistical support for granted.

At Columbia my father led a charmed life. As an instructor in 1936 he had fought off, apparently by sheer force of personality, a departmental move to fire him. His dissertation on Matthew Arnold was published three years later, and he came under the protection of the all-powerful Nicholas Murray Butler, president of Columbia from 1902 to 1945, who read the book and personally oversaw his promotion. Under the circum-

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stances, my father can be excused a certain detachment from the rough-and-tumble of departmental affairs, but I was unprepared for his account of a "strange immersion in academic experience," which I came upon recently in a notebook he had kept in 1952:

> On Sunday I called Emery Neff [my father's senior colleague and former thesis advisor] to tell him of my dissatisfaction with a dissertation . . . of the committee for which he is a member. He tells me, yes it is very bad, one of Sue Nobbe's weak sisters and we have a long talk about the bad quality of her dissertations, her weak kindliness etc., & that the diss. ought to be stopped. I call Sue to tell her of my opinion & we arrange to meet and discuss it. When I visit her she is bitter and hostile, to me but esp. to E.N. She bursts out in a passion, almost tearful—"How long can I go on with *that man* doing what he does?" Seems E.N. had approved the diss. chapter by chapter & now that I had judged it adversely, was turning coat—"as he always does." She wants to know what he *wants* that he acts this way—he has everything. She has been bullied and chivvied by everyone—by me, who come up with my notions, who reject dissertations because writers don't "speak my language." I don't take the weak candidates, nor does E.N.—someone must—she does—and then we attack them. What about intellectual standards, the reputation of the university & the dept.—she doesn't care—I am horrified by E.N.'s perfidy, which I recognize and agree not to force the issue, merely to say what I think in a neutral way. But I am horrified by her.—Her insistence that all the diss. are as bad, only that in the 19th century there are people like myself, E.N. and Jacques [Barzun] who come along with special incomprehensible and illegitimate notions to upset the apple cart.—Her position is, of course, no different from that of Marjorie Nicolson, who believes we must take everyone and by implication give everyone a degree.—S.N. says I know nothing about the nature of the dept. that I live a special & protected life. What did I want to be in grad. school for? if I want to write? And if I am in it, I should be in it from the ground up. I tell her of my withdrawal & she is surprised & pleased. [My father had already decided to withdraw from graduate teaching.]—I feel as if a stone had been turned over for my inspection of the life under it and I am almost physically nauseated by what I see—suddenly the whole dreadfulness of the system and the people presents itself to me fully and simply and I am horrified by my acquiescence for so long. . . . I cannot quite get my mind around my isolation—I find myself wondering who am I who have always had so modest a notion of my powers . . . who am I to feel that these people are different in kind from me, and me superior? Yet feel it I do, and must, at this late date accept it, suspicious as I am still of the actuality of my powers. To accept it in secrecy and in absolute courtesy—it really needs silence & cunning, really needs the *mask.*

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This puts my father's aloofness in a different light. What disturbs me most is not his extravagant contempt for his colleagues (I can at least hope he was indulging himself), or his implicit sexism, or his instinct to think first of his own well-being, but his utter disconnection from the life of his department and the university as a whole. When he underwent his "strange immersion," he had been a full-time member of the Columbia faculty for thirteen years—twenty, counting his years as an instructor—and a full professor for four. Had he never stopped to think that he was employed by a teaching institution? That in an imperfect world there would always be weak dissertations? That his department, having supervised a student through the long process of research and writing, was honor-bound to stand by its implicit validation of the students' work? Had he never put his exacting standards to the test by participating in graduate admissions?

When Professor Nobbe rubbed my father's nose in these questions, his response was to put as much distance as possible between himself and the whole situation. Did he even wonder what it would mean to the department if someone of his stature stopped advising graduate students? Yet however selfish his response, it was not disingenuous. Behind the "mask" was neither serenity nor contempt, but a near-total obliviousness to his surroundings. Without President Butler's patronage earlier in his career, what would my father's fate have been?

Although the popular and semi-popular work on ADD includes some serious studies, it is essentially a self-help literature. Almost inevitably it has an optimistic tone and plays to the hope that ADD can be a blessing in disguise. The disorder is compared to having a Ferrari engine under the hood of the family car, capable of great things once we recognize that it demands far more than the usual amount of care and skill; or else we are told that compulsively skipping from one task or idea to another can give a sense of the "big picture" unavailable to those with normal powers of concentration. I know from experience that the second proposition is true. It is exhilarating to map the forest when everyone else is looking at individual trees. The pleasure evaporates quickly, however, if one comes to grief for never having learned that trees grow in the ground.

All in all, there is little in ADD that I would construe as a gift, however ambivalent, and there are manifestations that cannot be called gifts by any stretch of the imagination. Inability to get started is one of them. My father suffered terribly from what he saw as a writing block and my mother saw as depression: "There were days and days when he sat in front of his typewriter unable to write a word." (Unless otherwise noted, direct quotations from my mother are from a series of taped reminiscences that she made in the early 1980s in preparation for *The Beginning of the Jour-*

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ney.) Apparently these doldrums were among my father's reasons for staying in analysis, though he never made much headway against them.

Another non-gift is rage, which the self-help literature cloaks with the word *impulsivity.* Without doubt, it is the most destructive aspect of the disorder. Throughout his life, my father was subject to what my mother called "encapsulated madness": periodic fits of rage directed, it seems, exclusively at her. I remember some of this from my childhood. There was a period, it must have been around 1960, when my father would come home from work in the late afternoon, pour himself a drink, and sit down in the living room to talk over the day with my mother. Inevitably, or so it seems in memory, she would make some sort of misstep, imperceptible to me, and he would pounce: "What do you mean by *that*?" Then they were off, he sneeringly aggressive, she defensively snippy or ostentatiously long-suffering. The quarrels were never about anything I could recognize; they just *were.* I think they usually ended with the ceremony of dinner. Civilization had to be preserved, mostly for my sake, and whether my parents ate or not, by the time the meal was over, the quarrel was over, too, until the next time.

This memory dovetails with a story my mother used to tell. At some point in my childhood, both she and my father felt overwhelmed by fatigue and shortness of temper in the late afternoon and evening. Most parents of young children go through this, but temperament and age (they were both forty-three when I was born) cut my parents off from the casual sharing of experience, and they seem to have thought their case unique. They consulted their doctor, who prescribed a medication called Dexamyl.

According to the *Physicians' Desk Reference* for 1952, Dexamyl is "a balanced combination of [the stimulant] 'Dexedrine' and [the barbiturate] Amobarbital." Its action is described as follows: "(1) The 'Dexedrine' restores mental alertness and optimism, and dispels psychogenic fatigue. (2) The Amobarbitol, unlike other barbiturates, has a distinct euphoric effect. In addition, it relieves nervous tension, anxiety and agitation. The therapeutic scope of Dexamyl extends from clearly minor emotional disturbances and neuroses . . . to severe psycho-neurotic states. Thus, Dexamyl is widely useful in everyday practice to provide symptomatic relief from mental and emotional distress." The medication worked like a charm, and they went on taking it for several years, until the doctor died or retired and their supply dried up. Once established with a new doctor, they asked him for more Dexamyl, but he refused, shocked that their previous doctor had given them unrestricted access to what he assured them was a dangerously addictive drug.

My mother told the story to illustrate the mind's ascendancy over the body: they did not know it was supposed to be addictive, therefore it wasn't addictive. When they ran out, they simply stopped taking it, with

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no ill effects. For me the implications are quite different. Dexedrine was one of the first medications used to treat ADD and is still one of the most successful. I do not know what effect it had on my mother—presumably the effect her doctor meant it to have—but I suspect that for my father it was more successful than he or anyone else understood. It even seems, from things my mother said, that he was able to work with unusual efficiency during those years.

Of all the ironies in my family's blindfold struggle with ADD, I find this one almost too painful to contemplate. My father stumbled on the right medication, only to have it taken away. Neither Dexedrine nor Amobarbitol is physically addictive. However, both have the potential for abuse, and both may create a psychological dependency. My mother's interpretation notwithstanding, their spate of quarrels was probably triggered by my father's going off Dexamyl, coupled with an unsuccessful attempt to fill the gap by "medicating" himself, as ADD sufferers often do, with alcohol.

I have said that not just my father but probably *his* father, David, suffered from ADD. The evidence is scanty but compelling. One piece is circumstantial: it was rumored that David botched the reading at his bar mitzvah, disgracing himself so badly that the only recourse was to pack him off to America. ADD is not the only possible explanation, but it is a good one, since it could account for the calamity either through inadequate study or a failure of concentration during the ceremony—or both. If my grandfather's parents had already endured his seeming inability or refusal to move up to his proper place in the family, this fiasco could have been the last straw. As the public demonstration of his inability to assume a man's role, it would have been as symbolic an event as the bar mitzvah itself was meant to be.

It is probably significant that although David Trilling became a successful tailor, with a craftsman's pride in his work, when he decided to go into business as a wholesale furrier he lacked both foresight and organizational ability, and failed dismally. It is certainly significant that, like Lionel, he had fits of rage. In my mother's words:

> Quite early Lionel told me about his father's terrible rages. There had been a particular scene that must have traumatized him; I know I've never got over just hearing about it. It seems that Mrs. Trilling [Lionel's mother, Fannie] was all dressed up for a party—they used to wear elaborate shirtwaists and skirts and she was wearing a lacy shirtwaist with tiny little buttons in back and she asked Mr. Trilling to button her up. He was mad at her for something and apparently, in the guise of buttoning her up, he took the blouse in his hands and purposely tore it. She started to cry and he acted as if he was remorseful and sort of soothed her. Then she asked him again to finish the buttons and he

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> deliberately tore the blouse a second time. It's a hideous story. And you must keep in mind that this was the man who was always described as a perfect gentleman. He was in some part a madman, with very little to compensate for it.

Fannie recognized the similarity between her husband's conduct and her son's, and made it the occasion for an important early rapprochement with my mother:

> Before we were married she said to me suddenly, very intensely, "If he ever gets into a rage with you, just take a bottle and hit him. . . ." Now I didn't know what in the world she was talking about. . . . Later I began to think what she had meant, as I learned from Lionel about his father's rages, I thought she meant that if he ever shows anything like that don't put up with it. . . . But through the years I began to understand that she meant something else. . . . She loved Lionel dearly, she was devoted to him absolutely, but she was looking at life very realistically and she knew that Lionel had this dark side too. It wasn't just that Mr. Trilling had his but Lionel had his. And she was saying to me, don't let him get to you. Don't let him move in on you; don't take it as authority in your life. . . . Now what she wanted me to do I don't know. But anyway I'm sure she was giving me what I'm sure was an absolutely difficult warning for her to give me and therefore done in very great affection, and thinking it was best for Lionel too.

Fannie's counsel, I am sure, had nothing to do with taking Lionel's "dark side" as "authority." When she advised my mother to hit him with a bottle, she meant that his rages were literally irrational. It wasn't just that they didn't make sense, it was that they were completely inaccessible to reason or words. I have no way of knowing if David beat Fannie, but she must have feared that he would. With her husband in the grip of this incomprehensible rage, she may actually have feared for her life. I think her warning to my mother was intended to convey the primal quality of her fear: *He will be out of his mind, he will not know who you are or what he is doing, or he will not care. Be prepared to defend yourself.* Even if Diana could no more have picked up a gin bottle and clobbered Lionel than she could have flown to the moon, she was forewarned emotionally: if this doesn't bring out your fight-or-flight reflex, nothing in civilized society will.

My mother took the connection between my fits of rage and those of my father and grandfather for granted, but she never believed that such aberrant behavior could be passed on by biological means alone. In her eyes it was a psychological curse on all Trilling men: rage against the women closest to them. If her intuition (and my father's, since he never

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corrected her) remained so far off the mark after years of observing and trying to manage my behavior, how must they have responded when the disorder first took hold of me? The best I can say is that I am here to tell the tale. Common sense was in short supply.

Before the onset of recognizable ADD symptoms, I suffered from a variety of fears. Most troubling to my parents was my fear of elevators. I did not know how they worked, and I feared they would fall out of control, or worse, get stuck. My parents never tried a practical approach, such as having the building superintendent show me the safety mechanism. Nor, it seems, did they stop to think that they lived on the ground floor because my mother was desperately afraid of heights, and that I must have sensed her fear.

Instead, when I was not quite four years old, my mother wrote to the psychologist Erik Erikson, detailing my problem with elevators and requesting his advice. My parents had never met Erikson, but they had read and admired his book *Childhood and Society*. My mother's letter was three and a half single-spaced pages. Not content to describe, she ventured an interpretation of her own: "I had come to suspect that possibly his claustrophobic feeling about elevators represented a fear of his own powerful penetration into the dark enclosure of the female sexual organ."

Erikson wrote back that he would be glad to have a look at me, but my parents never took him up on the offer. They had no car, neither of them knew how to drive, and the journey to Massachusetts was obviously too big to contemplate. Instead, my mother wrote again in a few months, detailing a largely new set of problems and implicitly requesting his professional opinion by mail (and without payment). By way of answer, Erikson suggested that my reluctance to ride in elevators might have something to do with my parents' evident unwillingness to take control of another mechanical conveyance, the car. I am not sure in what spirit Erikson made this suggestion, but my mother never forgave him for it.

The actual start of my ADD is hard to reconstruct. My mother's letters to Erikson, and to Marianne Kris, who later became her analyst, give a full account of my behavior, but they are frustrating to read because they bear so little on the real problem. Again and again she agonized over patterns of behavior that were merely typical of my age. Nevertheless, there are passages that tally with my remembered sense of something going dreadfully wrong. The letters speak of growing aggression and diminishing control: running into people on the street, breaking my toys, pushing my best friend off her bicycle. At one point I said to my mother, "Everyone in the class has learned not to hit except me. I just can't learn."

My parents tried one school after another, hoping that in the right environment I would settle down. It felt like a different school each month, perhaps because the sense of not fitting in was so strong each

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time. Nothing worked, and there came a time when I went to no school at all, but only to a therapist, Miss Harley. Eventually I was sent to the Reece School, which my parents told me was a special school for children who have problems. There may have been no alternative, and it was a benevolent place. I stayed there until 1959, when I re-entered the mainstream in sixth grade. I saw Miss Harley several times a week during those early years and, with diminishing frequency, for years after.

Everything that I now recognize as a symptom of ADD was the object of total war, and I felt more like the battlefield than like one of the combatants. Then and later, my mother insisted that the collaboration of parents, school, and therapist was the key to my success. If so, it exacted a high price. Everything I did was scrutinized and discussed. "I hear you're doing well," Miss Harley would say; or, just as often, "I hear you're slipping." How I hated those words, not just for their content but because they reminded me I had no privacy or autonomy. When Miss Harley first saw us (or so I was told), she did not understand why my mother had to be inside my head all the time, but soon came to see that it was necessary. "You had no ego," my mother would explain to me. "I had to be your ego."

So far as I know, my parents never sought a medical diagnosis: drugs were not an option. Nor was I tested for learning disabilities. Yet we all took it for granted that I couldn't function in society because I was "sick." The manifestations of ADD were not my fault, but they were my responsibility. Any failure of control on my part was held against me as a failure of my will to be cured. Therapist and special school notwithstanding, it was made clear to me at all times that only I could fight the disorder and that I must continue to fight it regardless of my success or failure in the short run, because my survival as a human being was at stake.

If I needed a reminder of what would happen if I failed, there were always the other children at Reece. After so many years I have no way of knowing how seriously disturbed they really were, but I was meant to see them as the ones who were doomed to fail, who had already failed. I remember one boy who used to flap his arms like wings and say over and over that he wanted to go to the sun; another who drooled copiously when he got overexcited, which was often; and a third whose tantrums were so violent that at least once a day he had to be carried out of the room, struggling and screaming obscenities. (If he was a fellow ADD sufferer, my case was mild by comparison.)

The ruling emotions of my childhood were frustration, discouragement, and humiliation. Anger at being allowed no inner life did not surface until much later. But the most important emotions were the ones I did *not* feel: deep personal shame and self-loathing. I hated having my personal failures and successes monitored by a team of professionals. I

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hated being taken each day to join my class of lost souls. But most of all I hated my outbursts. They made me feel dirty. Even when I was powerless against them, or especially then, I knew instinctively that they were not *me.* Because I had something so repulsive and so near at hand to hate, it never occurred to me to hate myself.

My father's response to my difficulties was stranger than my mother's. He knew his own behavior, he knew his father's, and he knew mine, but he never took me aside, at six or sixteen, and told me he knew how it felt because he had been through it himself. There was no advice on how best to control it, and when my control failed, as it so often did, no sympathy from someone who had been through that too. Is it conceivable that he failed to see the pattern? Did he hate his own father's behavior so much that he refused to see it in himself or me? Did he convince himself that the best way to help me was to uphold an absolute standard of behavior instead of offering himself as a flawed model? Was he paralyzed by guilt at having passed the disorder on to me—not, as he saw it, by impersonal heredity, but by his own example? Was he just too proud, too concerned for his public image, to confess his problem to anyone? Or had his public image so completely merged with his personality that he no longer recognized the problem in himself?

I shall never have the whole answer, but an unusually long and personal notebook entry from June 1955 tells me more than I expected to learn. Although my father understood the role of aloofness and polite superiority in his public image, there were times when he detested those qualities in himself. He wrote of his "intense disgust with my official and public self, my growing desire to repudiate it." This "public self" projected not only "accomplishment and achievement" and "public virtue," but also a "character-drive to an Olympian or royal position." What he meant is the kind of official unassailability we associate with royalty, a sense of being *exempt* from interruption and criticism rather than impervious to them. Intrusions on his dignity, he said, struck him with all the force of lèse-majesté.

He was not the only person to see it. There is a reference to "the accusation D had made a few years ago of my assumption of a role of superiority, of haughtiness, of indifference or condescension to others." But rail against it as he might, he recognized it as part of himself. According to the same notebook entry, when my father asked his analyst point-blank whether it would be possible to get rid of it, the analyst spoke of the difficulty of a "change of character." Did either of them make the connection between my father's "public self" and the "mask" that simultaneously concealed, protected, and symbolized his disconnection from the human world around him? I would like to think that my father sensed it, if only

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subliminally, and that this was his real reason for hating the "public self." But I have no evidence that this is so.

More than anything else, it was my father's "public self" that limited his response to my difficulties. My lack of control triggered a comparable lack of control in him, through the action of his "royal" persona: I had committed lèse-majesté. His struggle to "repudiate" that persona paralleled my struggle against rage. Although he was a mature thinker and I was a child of six, I have little difficulty accepting that his struggle was, in its way, almost as desperate and uncertain as mine. One thing is clear. He was in a position to help me only when he was victorious, and that did not happen often. Only in such a light do passages like these make sense:

> I found myself able to deal with J's troubles with extraordinary ease—it was as if pride had been excised from all parts of my feeling; I did not feel affronted or humiliated by his bad conduct.

And later, after a bad patch in which I lost control repeatedly:

> But with momentary near-lapses, I kept my equanimity. . . . What was operating was the repudiation of the public character, the character of prestige, that must not be assailed or questioned. Warnings to myself that this couldn't be expected to last. Dexomyl *[sic]* perhaps helped.

It should seem the height of self-centeredness for him to write as though he, not I, were the one struggling to keep his head above water. At the very least it should seem bathetic for him to treat the struggle with his "character of prestige" as a kind of Armageddon. But to another ADD sufferer it makes sense. My father's "character-drive to an Olympian or royal position" was less an affectation than a defense mechanism. He needed a way to block out unaccustomed or unmanageable stimuli, and he found one, or it found him.

I am sure that his "choice" of this particular defense was involuntary: it was rooted in his childhood, when his family explicitly encouraged him to identify with royalty. He must have despised himself for adopting a defense that turned his own child into an affront and a humiliation, but there was very little he could do. Getting rid of that defense would have left him naked to the world. Keeping it left him vulnerable to his own contempt, and to whatever stimuli managed to penetrate his barrier of superiority and indifference—including, of course, me. Only through a rare combination of equilibrium and willpower, as dependent on outside circumstance as on internal resolve, could he put aside his defense and be simply a loving father. But even that was a near-run thing. Simply to keep from losing his temper at my loss of temper was a victory for him.

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The next step, acknowledging that he and I were in the same boat, was impossible.

During his entire career as an interpreter of literature, I doubt that my father ever solved a problem, in the sense of marshaling evidence to prove or disprove a theory. On the contrary, he built his career on the mistrust of certainties and was rarely content with a simple answer when a complex one could be found. His response to the issue of visiting hours at Columbia reads like a caricature of his intellectual style, but good caricature exaggerates what is already there. He was most comfortable exploring implications, ambiguities, cultural states of mind: issues without a beginning or an end, without a right or wrong answer. He never had to take sides, or take action, because he made it his job to remind people that there were more than two sides to every question and that effective action was usually the result of oversimplification. It was his extraordinary good fortune that the cultural climate and his personal style combined to make these reminders not just acceptable but popular.

Success came at a price, both personal and professional. My father's view of life was more than self-consciously complex, it was self-consciously tragic. Of all "simple" solutions he mistrusted happiness the most. The idea of living happily ever after must have seemed almost crass to him. Certainly it left him all dressed up with no place to go. Much more serious, if happiness were attainable after all, it would mean that solutions were not only real but desirable, that wisdom and authority lay not in keeping an issue alive through ever more complex analysis but in resolving it by decisive insight and action. This was usually beyond his power. ADD slows reaction time: one has to stop and think about responding. The same condition that made my father a bad tennis player left him ill equipped to handle a moral emergency. Taken by surprise, he would make the wrong choice, or simply fail to react until too late.

In 1967 my parents were part of a delegation of American intellectuals sent to Germany by the Ford Foundation to discuss world affairs with German industrialists. Although some of the delegates brought their wives, my mother was a delegate in her own right, the only such woman in the group. At one industrialist's mansion, the discussion took place in a room with a gallery reached by a flight of stairs. Years later my mother told me how, as the meeting was called to order, the women were shown to the stairs and told they were welcome to watch and listen from the gallery. My mother explained that she was one of the delegates and would be participating in the discussion, but their host politely ignored her. She was ready to walk out and quit the tour in protest, but waited for Lionel's support before committing herself. He did come to her aid, to the extent

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of remonstrating with the host and the Ford Foundation courier, but when it became clear that no exception would be made, he allowed her, and she allowed herself, to be shepherded into the gallery with the other women. By way of protest, Lionel did not join the other men, but sat on the stairs for the duration of the meeting.

My mother never forgot the occasion. She considered his behavior cowardly, foolish, and disloyal. I don't like it either, but if things happened as she said, I can at least understand what went wrong. If my father had had a few minutes alone, he would have thought the situation through, and would probably have supported my mother as strongly as she wished. But he had to act spontaneously, with all eyes on him, and that was his undoing. He disliked self-display, making a scene, anything that threatened to rock the social boat. I am sure he did not consciously choose social propriety over loyalty to his wife, but the pressure of the occasion kept him from realizing how seriously his loyalty was being tested. He could keep only one thing in mind, and it was the wrong thing.

As understanding began to dawn, he tried to atone with an act of protest, but the result was merely awkward. He could have left the room, or he could have climbed the stairs to join his wife in the gallery, but he did neither. He moved toward her, but not all the way. He took himself out of the discussion, but again, not all the way. In physical form, it was the same principled indecision that characterized much of his work. Could he ever escape the voice of William James?

> No class of [people] have better sentiments or feel more constantly the difference between the higher and the lower path in life than the hopeless failures, the sentimentalists, the drunkards, the schemers, the "dead-beats," whose life is one long contradiction between knowledge and action, and who, with full command of theory, never get to holding their limp characters erect. No one eats of the fruit of the tree of knowledge as they do; as far as moral insight goes, in comparison with them, the orderly and prosperous philistines whom they scandalize are sucking babes. And yet their moral knowledge, always there grumbling and rumbling in the background,—discerning, commenting, protesting, longing, half resolving,—never wholly resolves, never gets its voice out of the minor into the major key, or its speech out of the subjunctive into the imperative mood, never breaks the spell, never takes the helm into its hands.

So far, the story covers only the "passive" side of my father's ADD: lack of initiative, lack of personal force. Bad force, the problem of rage, was a different matter. So far as I know, rage itself never interfered with my father's professional duties. His intellectual adjustment to it, however,

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was more complex and less successful than his intellectual adjustment to indecisiveness. It distorted his personal and professional judgment in ways he would not have been happy to confront.

Freud was my father's hero. *Civilization and Its Discontents* was almost a sacred text for him. It is a paean to the repression of instinct—above all, repression of what Freud calls the death instinct, originally a self-destructive impulse, now largely redirected toward other human beings, and the source of all the evils of gratuitous aggression. My father's tragic view of life owed much to Freud's reminder that civilization in all its supposed glory had failed to keep its house in order. But his affinity with Freud went much deeper. For anyone subject to ungovernable rage, the instinct for destruction, including self-destruction, is not something to be deduced from history. It is self-evident and terrifying.

According to Freud, the struggle against the death instinct "is what all life essentially consists of, and the evolution of civilization may therefore be simply described as the struggle for life of the human species." For my father these words held a desperately needed assurance. They meant that his struggle for self-control was much more than an individual's battle with a nasty streak in his character. It was part of the great battle of humankind against all that is worst in itself. This adds a dimension to the image of restraint he cultivated, the Apollonian detachment of his "public self." If he seemed to personify civilization, it is because he had set out to do just that. Far from being a pose, for him it was a matter of life and death.

My father's belief in the saving power of repression carried beyond the obvious manifestations of the death instinct. He was consistently hostile to all forms of impulsive behavior. "Resist that impulse!" was the mantra my parents used to instill discipline in me as a toddler, long before the onset of my ADD. As I grew up, I realized that my father held all actions that were not directed toward a "worthy" goal, even nominally harmless ones, in deep contempt.

In my early twenties, as I approached the end of my course work in graduate school, I began planning a yearlong trip through Southwest and South-Central Asia. Knowing I had to decide between Byzantine and Islamic art as my chief field of study, I wanted to see as much as possible of both before making my choice. I also wanted to enjoy for the first time the pleasure of travel in unfamiliar and often difficult places, with plenty of time and the freedom to set my own itinerary as I went along. I was quite open about the adventurous aspect of the trip and felt I deserved it. Not only had I spent my whole life "in school," but since the age of fourteen I had willingly devoted all my summer vacations to the study either of foreign languages or of art in museums. The end of classes seemed a natural opportunity to do things differently.

My father did not see it that way. I made the trip in 1972 and 1973, and it was one of the defining experiences of my life, but I made it in the

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face of opposition so stubborn I could only see it as perverse. At first the issue was money. I had no source of funding, and my father balked at supporting the project. Then my department found me a place on the Smithsonian Institution's archaeological mission to Afghanistan: a two-month apprenticeship in the Central Asian desert, an equipment allowance, and a very flexible round-trip ticket, New York to Kabul! With this I realized that my savings were enough to cover living expenses for the year, and the plan became a reality. Yet my father was scarcely mollified. He disliked the direction my career was taking. Even my fascination with Byzantium disturbed him (though he often seemed to share it), as if I were turning my back on the whole European tradition. Islamic art was worse, a clear defection. He took it personally, as if I were sacrificing my "real" career just to put myself beyond his reach.

My plans were a subject on which no communication seemed possible between us, and things came to a head a few months before my departure, when my father wrote to my analyst in Cambridge, expressing his anxiety about the project:

> While I wholeheartedly approve of his wish to spen[d] a year abroad, I am disturbed by what strikes me as the dominantly symbolic nature of the undertaking Jim now seems to project, his apparent unwillingness to concentrate on any but the adventuristic aspects of his tour. When, for example, he speaks of his wish to go to Turkey, he mentions no particular monuments he wants to see and study but speaks only of his intention to travel "in the interior." . . . What comes to me when he speaks of his year of travel is the unwelcome idea that his view of it is being ruled by a phantasy of daring and independence which leaves little room for realistic assessments and intentions.

For many years his intransigence seemed to me, at best, the mark of a spoilsport; at worst, the mark of a father who could not bring himself to trust his son's good sense and professional commitment. It is true that by the time he wrote to my analyst, I refused to speak to him about specific monuments. I had given up on it, because whenever I had mentioned a site he had demanded to know in detail what it was and why it was important. Perhaps he really wanted to learn, or at least keep a channel open, but his way of asking was so inquisitorial, so overshadowed by suspicion of everything non-European, that I perceived only ignorance and hostility.

Recently I came upon a notebook entry from around 1963 that put the matter in a different light:

> Adventure: a word used by comfortable, habitual men to permit them the illusion that some part of their existence is free and courageous.

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In a very young man this could be an exercise in cynicism. Coming from a man in his late fifties, at the height of his reputation, it connotes, if not despair, at least quiet desperation, and a full awareness that he had brought it on himself. He had sacrificed not just the life of impulse but the possibility of adventure, with its implications of unpredictability, danger, and triumph. Both impulse and adventure—social, emotional, and intellectual adventure, as well as physical adventure—imply a partial surrender of control, a willingness sometimes to be carried along, sometimes to act decisively, but always to respond as the occasion demands, with confidence in one's ability to do the right thing at the right moment. My father could not do this. The letting go was too much like giving in to his own destructive impulses. The confidence just wasn't there.

Unwilling or unable to renounce adventure for himself alone, he imagined a world of closed frontiers in which adventure wasn't real, or if real, couldn't possibly be good. Hence "a phantasy of daring and independence," as though it could never be more; hence *adventuristic*, with its overtones of practical and moral irresponsibility, instead of *adventurous*. The spectacle of his own son, no scapegrace youth running off to join the Foreign Legion but a sedate and committed academic like himself, first planning an adventure, then going off and having it, must have threatened the armor of his soul.

But the armor had cracks in it from the start. My father knew what he was missing, and had other heroes than Freud. He admired Hemingway as the impulsive, self-centered man of genius, and Isaac Babel as the writer who could straddle the introspective, "powerless" world of the Jew and the violent world of the Cossack. I suspect my father looked up to Hemingway primarily for his vices. In the eyes of a younger contemporary, his devils would have seemed lusty and red-eyed: real artist's devils! Less known is my father's hero worship of Lord Nelson, the embodiment of grace under pressure—and sexual scandal. He kept a portrait medallion of Nelson on his bookcase and once told me that if he could be any person in history it would be Nelson. Failing that, his ambition (never fulfilled) was to write about Nelson. Each of these figures exemplified, in a different way, the interconnection of focus, violence, and traditional manhood. To recall Mark Krupnick's comment on my mother's book, each of them exemplified the kind of man my father wasn't much of.

My father's fascination with the unrepressed went even deeper. When I was in my early teens, he guided me through *Heart of Darkness*, rightly guessing that I would find the combination of ultimateness and ambiguity in a sinister, exotic setting irresistible. He drew from me an interpretation of Kurtz as a magnificent antihero for whom violence was an extension of personal charisma, and who used it to set himself outside the workaday limits of good and evil. This interpretation became a shibboleth

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for us, and a source of intimacy that never dimmed. Like the memory of a perfect camping trip, it epitomized the bond between father and son. Decades passed before I understood what an idiosyncratic interpretation it was.

Even if he was indulging the boundless callowness of a precocious eighth grader, it was not like him to stop with a reading so obviously incomplete, and so obviously amoral. Later, in his book *Sincerity and Authenticity*, he filled in the gaps, weaving *Heart of Darkness* into a web of historical ironies from which it emerges as a tale of individual and cultural self-deception instead of self-transcendence. But there was something about Kurtz that kept my father from judging him dispassionately. With his "memory of gratified and monstrous passions" (Conrad's phrase), Kurtz is "a man whose foul and bloody deeds make him what the terms of the story permit us to call a devil" (my father's phrase). He symbolized in the most elemental way both the letting go and the taking control that my father could never manage. He was everything my father had sacrificed to repression, a walking embodiment of the death instinct.

In presenting Kurtz to me as a figure in some way admirable, my father may have been indulging me, but he was also indulging himself. It was his way of letting go. The analogy of a camping trip is strangely exact: it allowed him to turn his back on civilization for a while, without risk. It may also have been his way, the only way open to him, of telling me that he shared my burden of impulse, and that he understood not only the need for control, but also its cost.

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JOHN UPDIKE

To a Skylark

Upon the lonely links, above the abundant rough,
you mount with ragged, insistent song
heavenward, far heavenward, then fall,
by staged descent, seeking a level of air
that sets your spirit off to best advantage—
a most congenial perch in breezy nothingness, a perch
from which you fall, aflutter, to a lower
and cling there like a leaf on thread-thin stem.

Some spot on earth holds you, some phantom nest
that roots your flighty, singing vertical.
Like cries of a crowd of children unseen,
your lone song floods the grass-floored void. I stand rapt,
lifted from my earthbound plight—my life, my game—
and freed by empathy with blind blithe being.

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Marine Hotel, North Berwick, Scotland, May 1998

On the hotel-room telly, Bing and Grace
and Frank—all dead, yet here so young—in *High Society,* a parable of how the rich
are truly better. "True Love" makes me cry.

Around me, dampness, golfing togs all soaked,
even the Dryjoys wet, wool sweaters rank
as sheep, their originals, and the sea
foaming beyond the windswept, rainswept links.

I fought for double bogeys with my life,
battered and blinking, mocked by the mouthing,
needy caddies, bitter to be out.
Scotland, where even the parson in his manse

hangs fire in predestination's kiln,
where walls' lee sides alone keep dry, where banks
thick-walled as mausoleums keep the faith
of a land whose single luxury is gorse.

Here Hollywood—blue Fifties Hollywood—
this Sunday afternoon is saccharine
in tepid tea so steeped it's dark as tar.
I knew "True Love" would make me cry. Sweet Grace,

her lovely china jaw, her fake accent,
and Bing, his bouncy syllables, his ears:
they perished far from us, one after golf
in Spain, the other on a Monaco curve.

Now Frankie, too, with heavy hoopla, gone.
Yet here they are, blue-tinted to beguile
this long Scots afternoon of drying out,
of readying myself for death with tears.

John Updike's most recent volumes of verse are *Collected Poems 1953–1993* and *A Helpful Alphabet of Friendly Objects.* He contributed the poems "Atlanta–Dallas/Fort Worth, 11:10 P.M." and "Slum Lords" to the Autumn 1998 issue of the SCHOLAR.

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Midway Through a Now Familiar Passage

E. A. HILBERT

Sed fugit interea, fugit inreparabile tempus.
—Virgil

Midway through a now familiar passage
in a poem read carelessly before,
you find yourself reading the words
aloud for a moment, quietly startled
that such beauty could come from your own lips.
The book tilts away in your hands, & the words
go away, just as the trees through the window
tilt slightly in the flecked gray wind, then return,
as the pages return, the words, the gradual
awe.
Far away, a dull bell rings, then is gone.
A siren sounds, soaring. Somewhere an odd thud
carpets the brittle silence. Footsteps fall.
All this silence. All this distance. Just who
is all this distance for if not for us?
The words are spoken again; the distance is drawn to
you, finally, entirely, & all
the world rains delicately for a moment.

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The Lions of Venice

GARRY WILLS

Wherever you turn in Venice, there are lions: strutting or lurking, colossal or miniature, placid or menacing. Entering the city as diplomats did in the Renaissance, you pass between two high columns on the Piazzetta by the Doges' Palace. One column, for some reason, has a man standing on a crocodile at the top. The other has the city's most famous emblem, a bronze lion with its wings spread for takeoff, its paws already dancing on the ground. It may not look so large up there on its perch, but it measures fifteen feet from the tip of its muzzle to the end of its tail, and five feet from its paws to the small of its back. Viewed from the balcony of the Doges' Palace, or from the plaza with opera glasses, it reveals its natty mustache, its leering grin, its opaque white eyes, its intricately curled mane—not a lion one wants to be on the wrong side of. It has an exotic history. Restorers decided in the 1980s that the bulk of its body is roughly 2,300 years old. The city it guards is a newcomer to this veteran, who has seen empires rise and fall but has spent his last 850 years at this sentinel post (with only a brief time of captivity in France).

Proceeding deeper into the Piazzetta, you will see more accommodating lions, carved in relief on the façade of the Doges' Palace. Two of them, facing in opposite directions, align their backs as a throne for a personified Venice who holds in her hands a sword and the scales of justice. The same configuration can be seen high up on the campanile at the left end of the Piazzetta. And across from it, on the right side of the Piazzetta, a winged lion stands in majestic profile over the formal entry to the Doges' Palace. This lion's right front paw props up an open book

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displaying the words, "Be at peace, Mark, my evangelist." So this is a preaching lion. All around the great portal (the Gate of Documents) are little ornamental lion heads projecting from the carved surface.

And so it goes, throughout the city. Go to the Arsenal, where Venice built its famous ships, and you will find stationed on its front lawn captured lions brought from Greece. Other lions project from the architecture or decorate the flagpole's base. Go to St. Mark's Club Extraordinary (Scuola Grande di San Marco), now a hospital, where lions carved in low relief by the Lombardo family guard the door. Cross to the nearby island of Murano, and you will find a casual lion sprawled over the arch of a little bridge. In the church of St. Francis of the Vineyard, a very philosophical lion, painted by Tiepolo, peeks down at you from the roof of a chapel. Out on the walkway near the Danieli Hotel there are monstrous lions, ten times life-size, cast in bronze. One is gnawing at chains that have bound it for a time. (A cat sunning itself on the lion's glistening back does not notice the discomfort of its oversize relative.) Above almost every altar in the city there is a lion in one of the quadrants of the vault.

These churchy lions are the fathers of all the other felines in Venice. Their pedigrees are even longer than that of the lion on the Piazzetta's pillar. That creature dates from Cilicia, in what is now Turkey, in the third or fourth century B.C. The lions of the altar vaults date back to Babylonia of the sixth century B.C., where Ezekiel saw a vision of God's chariot-throne, guarded by four creatures. Each creature had four faces, set in four different directions—the faces of a man, a lion, an ox, and an eagle (Ezekiel 1:10). This vision was adapted and simplified in the Book of Revelation, where the four creatures *are,* respectively, a man, an ox, a lion, and an eagle (Revelation 4:7). They became symbols of the apocalyptic end of the world (like the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse, in Revelation 6:1–17), and then of the entire body of revelation leading up to that ultimate fulfillment.

Since the four gospels—of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John—were considered the greatest revelation of God's purpose in Jesus, their authors, the four evangelists, became associated with the four creatures. Theologians found ways to show that the symbol expressed the essence of each book's writer: Matthew the man for his supposed interest in human history, Mark the lion for his opening scene of John in the desert, Luke the ox for his implied reference to Isaiah's ox at the manger, and John the eagle for his soaring hymn to the Logos of God. These are the symbols painted in the quadrants over each altar, as witnesses to the mystery they wrote about. They stand, as well, at key places like the mosaic in the dome of St. Mark's Basilica that is nearest the altar.

When Mark's body was brought to Venice from Constantinople in the year 828, a myth was created that he had paused at the future site of

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Venice during an evangelizing mission to Dalmatia, and was assured in a dream that he would find his last resting place here (the words in the dream were "Be at rest, Mark my evangelist"). Mark's lion now was not only connected with Venice; it was the city's symbol. It was painted as such by Carpaccio. The large Carpaccio lion now in the Doges' Palace is an amphibious creature stepping out of the water, where it has asserted its supremacy, onto the land—Carpaccio painted at a time when the *terraferma* empire had to be defended. Behind his lion you can see the skyline of Venice, with its campanile and lion pillar, and sails deployed on the lagoon; but to your left is a dense scene of rocky forest, demonstrating that the city could now command a world unlike its first habitation in the marshes or its second sphere of power on the high seas. The spread wings of the lion are the sails of Venetian vessels, but its stealthy tread moves into a further arena of power.

So complete did the identification between lion and city become that other powers said that they had defied or succumbed to the lion, or to Mark, as a shorthand surrogate for Venice. Throughout the region known as the Veneto, you come across the lion sculptured in profile, with the open book in its paw, standing over doorways or on pillars, as a sign of submission to Venetian rule. In Padua and elsewhere, the dim traces of such a figure on walls or doorways commemorate the time when the lion was razed, Venetian rule overthrown. The ultimate humiliation occurred when Napoleon conquered Venice and lowered the lion from its pillar, to be taken in segments to Paris, where it stayed for eighteen years. That was in 1797, and newspaper cartoons show the lion trammeled in a net, or rolled over on its back, or being toyed with by children. Enemies rejoiced in this downfall of the ancient republic, so proud of its leonine ways. To defeat Venice was to beard with impunity the lion, to dethrone Mark himself. Be *not* at peace, my evangelist.

In the days of its power, in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, the lion of Venice was too grand to be treated with familiarity. It demanded a certain heraldic and formulaic reverence, even from a whimsical artist like Carpaccio (whose dragons and basilisks are deflated like Macy's balloons by St. George or St. Tryphonius). Luckily, there was another lion pullulating throughout Venice that could be more the pussycat than Mark's evangelizing beast. This cat Carpaccio was able to paint with a touch of humor. It was the lion that keeps St. Jerome company in his desert hermitage. Jerome was a favorite saint in all parts of Italy, but he had a special appeal for Venetians, since he came from nearby Dalmatia, part of the Venetian empire and the home of many immigrants to Venice. The Dalmatians even had their own club, the Slavonic Club Ordinary (Scuola degli Schiavoni), for which Carpaccio created three large paintings devoted to the legend of St. Jerome.

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In the first painting, Jerome brings his lion onto a monastery's grounds, and the monks flee from it in a cinematic blur—even a deer kept on the grounds leaps away at the sight of such a grim intruder. But this is a very friendly lion. It lifts its paw in acknowledgment of Jerome's ministrations (the saint has, like Androcles, removed a stone that was cutting into the pads of its paw). The lion, facing to your right in profile, is like a simpleminded younger brother to the imperial animal Carpaccio painted in profile, facing left, for the Doges' Palace. Instead of propping up a book with its paw, it reaches out in a "let's shake hands" gesture.

In the picture that follows this one, on its right, the dead St. Jerome is stretched out on the ground. The lion, also lying on the ground, twists its neck around, lifts its head, and lets out a roar of grief. The monks, also mourning their saint, pay the lion no attention, since it is now a familiar member of the monastic community. Even the other animals go about their business without any concern for it. A crying lion is not an imperial figure.

Jerome's domesticated lion gave the artists of Venice a chance to study the natural grace and moody features of real lions, which were collected and put on public display. In 1427 the authorities in Florence sent three captive lions to the Lion City, to express solidarity with their new ally. Jacopo Bellini, in his celebrated sketchbooks, drew a lion staring forlornly through the bars of its special dungeon in the Doges' Palace. An earlier artist had drawn lions frisking about with such balletic grace that Bellini bound the pages into one of his own sketchbooks. In Titian's great tragic Jerome of 1575 (now in Milan at the Brera), the half-naked saint kneels in an agony of remorse before his desert crucifix, and the mournful lion in the shadows looks as crushed as its master. The next year, the year of his own death, Titian put Jerome, by an unexpected collocation, in the Pietà now at the Accademia. Here matched lion heads appear as reliefs on the pedestals that flank the dead Christ—as if the old Jerome had outlived even his lion, which is remembered only in funerary masks, the King Lear of liondom.

But frisking or melancholy lions are not the true representatives of Venice. For that we need the four-pawed evangelist or the imperial beast on the pillar. The latter is appropriate precisely because it is mysterious. For most of its time on the pillar, widely different theories were held about its past and about its weird appearance. When it was taken down in 1797, a critic of Venetian rule exulted, "We shall, at last, no longer have that monstrous chimera in view, a creature that was never known in creation." Seen up close, its face looks partly simian, partly devilish, partly human—an effect created in part by the placement of its ears on the sides of its head, not on top. Was it intended by its creators to be a lion? Restorers at work on it in the 1980s concluded that it was. Studying many Near Eastern parallels, they found the closest to be the winged and horned lions that carry a standing statue of Sandon, the tutelary god of Tarsus in

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Cilicia. When that region became Christian, the lion was shorn of its horns and wings, which removed its pagan onus. It must, even in this early period, have acquired some sacred meaning, since ancient bronze statues of this size were almost always melted down for the reuse of their metal. The lion of Judah was a symbol of Christ, as one descending from the line of Judah. This or some other Christian association must have protected the statue in a context of worship. (It would not have been saved by any tie to Mark, since his creature from Revelation was itself winged, and this bronze had its wings removed.)

The lion was wrenched from its Christian setting in Turkey by a Venice intent on the aggrandizement of St. Mark's in the twelfth century. The pillar on which the lion was raised had just come to the city in the same way—a stunning monolith of oriental granite whose transport and erection were a great feat of engineering. The lion had new wings fitted to it, to assert the connection with Mark. Its right front paw was not flush with the ground level of the other three, which gave it a somewhat jaunty or prancing air, appropriate to an animal with spread wings. But the new wings had not been fitted to the bronze with sufficient stability. The statue had to be taken down in the thirteenth century and given a lower pair of wings, less vulnerable to wind pressure. It was also given a trailing tail (the original tail had curled up onto the lion's back). Mark's lion reigned for five centuries in this guise, until Napoleon's engineers hauled it to earth. By the time it came back to Venice in 1815, after Napoleon's reign had ended, its dismantling and reassembly left it rickety. It was refitted with new bronze joints and still another pair of wings, these with a higher profile than the last. Its present form was thus established, though it would make two more trips to earth—in World War II to protect it from possible bombs, and in 1985, when the capital on which it stands had to be repaired. Given this latter chance to study and restore it, conservationists spent five years making it structurally capable of remaining on the pillar (its companion statue is a replica, since its stone has not weathered as well as the bronze from antiquity).

As any descendant of the Ezekiel vision should be, it is an exotic beast, an apocalyptic sign and a political defi, a *monstre sacré.* Scholars seeking literary clues to the creatures of Ezekiel and Revelation go to the same part of the world that supplies visual parallels for the lion of Venice. Its oriental connections make it suit both Mark the evangelist and the Eastern empire his city acquired and lost. The lion has suffered through all the city's vicissitudes over eight centuries of fame and shame, of downfall and recovery. Its silhouette, at dawn or dusk, in mist or glare, gives Venice comfort. Its eerie grin hides a thousand secrets, carried here from its bizarre beginnings and kept faithfully above the city whose identity it guards.

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Eurydice

CARL DENNIS

If the dead could speak, I'd entreat you
Not to blame yourself for losing me near the exit.
I was gone before you turned to glimpse me.
Your hope I would follow you into the light—
That was only a poet's faith in the power of music.
I followed as far as the law of Hell allowed me
And then turned back to my dark home.
For us to live together, you'd have to descend
Again to the place that chills the heart of the living.
I wouldn't want you to lie awake beside me
Straining to look on the bright side,
Spinning out plan after plan full of adventure.
I wouldn't want you to wait with patience
For my reply, to assume my lengthening silence
A thoughtful prologue. The hours would grow into years
While you dreamed up a song about our ascent
Meant for the ears of friends on our arrival.
I wouldn't want to hear it dwindle and fade
As the truth gradually came into focus
And you slowly deferred to a greater power.
Who would you be then? No one I know,
Not the man who thought his music enlarged creation.
If I could speak, child of the sun,
I would assure you I'm still your wife.
That's why I want you to stay as long as you can
Just as you are, the mistaken
Hopeful man I married.

Carl Dennis teaches English at the State University of New York at Buffalo. He is the author of seven books of poems, most recently *Ranking the Wishes.*

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Perpendicular Lives

STACY SCHIFF

Whoever suggested you only live once was no reader of biography. By an informal count, Ulysses S. Grant has lived 50 times; Benjamin Franklin, 87. The champion of this *Groundhog Day* phenomenon, American league, may be Abraham Lincoln, with 132 lives to his credit. You could assemble a battalion of Churchill biographers, a brigade for Bonaparte. Literary figures live less often, but F. Scott Fitzgerald has still managed plenty of second acts. In the 1950s, an archivist advised a scholar that the best time to begin a new biography of, say, Jefferson was the day after the last one appeared in print. Four decades later it is still raining Jefferson. This leaves the next life-writer with nineteen shelves to read—or ignore—before he publishes the first post-DNA, post-Joseph-Ellis Jefferson.

The previous biographer knows where the bodies are buried, where the skeletons are closeted. Sometimes he has even taken some of them home with him. In my research for a biography of the French aviator Antoine de Saint-Exupéry, I traced crucial materials on the early days of flight to an institution called the Musée Air France. The Musée Air France appears neither in a phone book nor on a map; I finally determined that it resides in a Parisian suburb, in cartons, in an aviation scholar's basement. Attempts to extract material proved moderately successful. Having put in his own years on Saint-Exupéry, the keeper of the archives was perfectly willing to supply any document I could name in advance, sight unseen. More rewarding than this transatlantic guessing game was the one I had with the so-called Association des Amis de Saint-

Stacy Schiff's *Véra (Mrs. Vladimir Nabokov)* will be published by Random House this spring. The author as well of *Saint-Exupéry: A Biography*, Schiff has been a Guggenheim Fellow and a Fellow of the National Endowment for the Humanities.

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Exupéry. For some time I was discouraged from visiting the association's Paris office; I was assured I would find nothing of interest in its files. That would have been true had the files not contained the research of my most illustrious predecessor, to whom I had spoken long before, but who had never mentioned that his materials were archived, in a theoretically accessible place, across town. I remain in his (reluctant) debt.

How does the biographer come to terms with his forebears, the family he inherits when he commits to his subject? On the one hand the previous life-writer can be your essential guide. You haunt his footnotes; you cannibalize his acknowledgments. Your debt is immense. On the other hand, well, on the other hand, when you spill coffee on these volumes—they are your foundation, your friends, your pesky older siblings, the bane of your existence—it is difficult to convince yourself that you have done so accidentally. A great many of these stories have been told before; more so than any other dramas, lives consistently begin and end the same way. Part of the biographer's task is to make the well-worn fresh, to sing the ballad anew. And if you thought the world of your predecessor's rendition, why would you be coaxing Napoleon to life all over again?

Over the spring and summer of 1994, in large part as a result of having read Brian Boyd's two-volume life of Vladimir Nabokov, I began to grapple with the idea of writing about Nabokov's wife, Véra. She was all over Boyd's volumes and yet nowhere in sight. Her name appears on the dedication page of nearly every volume her husband published. And yet when she asked to be excused from his story, the biographers bowed to her wishes, figuratively rising in their chairs as she left the room. My curiosity about her was in no way stilled by Boyd's having argued convincingly that Véra Nabokov had redefined her husband's art, that her presence was woven through much of it, that the marriage had shaped that oeuvre thematically.

As things happened, Boyd and I wound up meeting before I had considered if, or how, I was going to approach him. His agent told my agent he was in New York for a brief stay; he had heard of my project; he was expecting my call; he could see me for breakfast. This was September 24, 1994. He wasted no time in making his feelings known that morning: There was no book in Mrs. Nabokov and no reason to think there might be. "Moreover, there is no documentation," he warned, although of course in a life in which the wife presides as secretary and agent, every document can be said, from one angle, to be hers. Toward the end of the meeting I asked the one question I didn't think I could afford not to ask but most dreaded articulating: Were I to attempt the project, would he feel I was trespassing? I wondered if I might count on an occasional bit of guidance. His answer was a magnanimous avowal that scholarship exists

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for subsequent scholars. The expression on his face said something altogether different.

I know I apologized at least once to Brian Boyd for not having followed his advice. I also resolved to keep my distance. And yet I understood that I couldn't write my book without him. Not only had he, before writing his biography, organized the Nabokovs' archives in Switzerland, but he had—by virtue of the many hours he had spent with my subject, researching *his* subject—written himself into my story. For months at a time, nearly until her death, he had seen Mrs. Nabokov daily. Most unforgivably, he had asked my questions. Put another way, I was jealous. Only much later did I come to appreciate this arrangement: It was as if Boyd were allowing me to observe my subject from behind a one-way mirror, while he handled the messy interrogation.

For the next year I imposed on him for an occasional address, for an elucidation, to ask if he had ever put a particular question to Mrs. Nabokov. We did not know each other well when, in February of 1996, I sent up an SOS from the Nabokov archives. In his text Boyd had referred to a diary kept by Véra. That journal was a high, if not a first, priority. By my third trip to the archive it had failed to turn up. No one other than Brian knew what it looked like. Nor was anyone else remotely certain that it existed. In desperation I faxed him at his home in New Zealand, essentially to ask what I was looking for. The object of my quest, he offered, was a blue, paperback-sized volume, bound with a gold clasp. It turned out to have been buried in deep storage during a move. I found it, but without Boyd I would not have known even to look for it.

The diary—it is actually a recycled 1951 date book, in which both Nabokovs began to record the history of *Lolita*'s 1958 publication, a job Véra assumed after a few dual-authored pages—speaks volumes about what happens when two biographers claim the same, or neighboring, turf. Rarely do two life-writers step in the same stream—documents turn up, interview subjects pass away, and all the while the culture evolves—but even when they do, they are like the proverbial blind men facing the elephant. Boyd read the date book as a history of *Lolita*. I read it as Véra's diary. Into her account of the novel's publication Mrs. Nabokov wove her delight in American television, her disdain for American college professors, her allergy to being photographed, her feelings about Judaism. Nowhere was she more candid. Obviously this mattered more to me than to Boyd, who was writing about her husband. Our orientation colored all. A magazine fact checker approached each of us with the same question: Did Nabokov often record his wife's observations in his diaries? I said yes. Boyd said no. How often is often? We are of course peering into a life, or a set of intergrading lives, from different angles. And that is before we have even begun to assemble those materials. A different rearrangement

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of the pieces will of course yield a different creature, the Rolling Stones' "Satisfaction" re-recorded by Otis Redding re-recorded by Devo.

Can two biographers tell the same story? Probably not, even if they want to. It is as if there is an expanded Heisenberg uncertainty principle at work in life-writing too: the more accurately you measure one dimension of a life, the more fully another escapes you. Moreover, the very presence of the examiner and his equipment distorts the experiment. And this is all before you factor in the chronicler's sensibility, his point of view, for which some of us read biography. "Each man makes his own Shakespeare," Sir Richard Burton reminded a scholar, decidedly not of the same school. In about as controlled an experiment as can be devised, an English journalist named Paul Webster and I were writing about Saint-Exupéry at the same time, from similar materials. Probably within months of each other we were granted access to the same clutch of privately held letters. Those letters portrayed the strains on the Saint-Exupérys' marriage in the late 1930s. Webster came down on the wife's side; I came down on the husband's. At its most basic level, all biography is connect-the-dots; like impudent children, we all attempt it differently.

From the outset, the biographer who ventures onto previously trod territory needs to address his forebears. There is something faintly patricidal about the enterprise. On the one hand, you hoist up your antecedents as paragons of scholarship; on the other, you must point up their insufficiencies, their biases, their outdatedness, at least enough to justify your existence—at least in your own mind. They are your essential guides; they are your straw men. What does the decorum dictate? Do you tip your hat, do you press firmly against the pedestal, or do you aim directly between the eyes?

Most of us issue the traditional bread-and-butter note. "I took great pains to be gracious and not denigrate anyone's work," reports Linda H. Davis, whose Stephen Crane biography follows five others, and who, at the same time, is of the school that believes that if a life has been well served, you wouldn't be tackling it again. Joseph Ellis gives the impression of skipping blithely between the raindrops of all prior Jefferson biographers, acknowledging two forebears as the standard by which all Jefferson chroniclers should be judged. Sometimes giants stand on the shoulders of giants. "I have read and reread so persistently in Leon Edel's classic five-volume life of Henry James that I will not be surprised if some of my formulations are unintended echoes of his own," concedes R. W. B. Lewis in his family portrait of the Jameses. In her incisive biography of Nora Joyce—a project of which Joyce biographer Richard Ellmann was skeptical at the outset—Brenda Maddox moves full circle. Ellmann had been discouraging but ultimately helpful, she acknowledged warmly. He is cited intermittently, as a source and an authority. The "even Richard

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Ellmann" waits until the appendix, where he is briefly assigned to the camp of those who could have been, and were not, more revealing. Maddox offers a crash course in how gently to nudge aside your elders when you owe them the world. Ellmann's biography is a triumph, but—concludes Maddox five pages from the end of her volume—"not unflawed." The words *otherwise* and *excellent* creep more quickly toward each other in Mary S. Lovell's discussions of an earlier Richard Burton biographer. Fawn Brodie's is a first-class study, "a volume that could hardly be improved upon"—and yet here are nine hundred new pages on Ms. Brodie's subject. Considerately, Ms. Lovell even offers up an excuse for her predecessor's perceived misreading: Clearly, time was not on Ms. Brodie's side.

At times the idol-toppling becomes the book. Martin Seymour-Smith's 1994 life of Thomas Hardy is nothing so much as an 886-page siege on the previous biographers. Seymour-Smith emerges from the very first chapter with guns blazing. (The belligerence must be contagious; two earlier chroniclers go down in the flap copy alone.) Hardy is there somewhere, but so are a lot of biographer-corpses. Graham Robb does the same, a little less rancorously, in his *Victor Hugo*. Hugo's outsized life is a perennial draw to biographers, at whom Robb delights in taking quick-witted pot-shots. This is biography as blood sport, and it is not for everyone. (Nabokov described it as biographer pursues quarry, rival biographer pursues biographer.) Lest anyone conclude it to be a British preserve, Hermione Lee felt very strongly that her debates with Virginia Woolf's prior chroniclers belonged in her notes, not in her text. The text was between Lee and her subject, exclusively.

All knowledge builds on prior knowledge, of course, but—had they been available—would Plato have asked Socrates for his notes? Assuming he has a living precedessor, and assuming that that individual has material unavailable to him, how does the outlander proceed? At the end of 1996—two years after our first meeting—Brian Boyd generously submitted to two long batteries of questions. Six months later, he got back to me about a few points on which he had needed to consult his interview notes with Véra, which he sent along. His June 1997 fax began with a paragraph so disarmingly frank—and an image so chillingly familiar—that I wasn't sure if I was being chastised or comforted: "I had a dream about you a week or so ago," he wrote. "You were saying to me: 'You thought you'd published something definitive about Nabokov, but you didn't really know anything about him, did you? You never found out what happened to three-quarters of every dollar he earned, did you? Take this cheque for $20,000, for instance . . .'"

None of which prevented me from going to sleep that night and dreaming of Brian. Probably I should have been relieved that we battled

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the same demons. Evidently I was not. I dreamed of his bitterly accusing me of having seen materials that he had never been able to see (which was in fact true) because I had essentially worked some kind of black magic (which was not). "So of course you were able to know things I couldn't, and that wasn't fair, was it?" he chastised. The finger-pointing was so brutal that I was startled to see, in the morning, that it figured nowhere in his fax. The next night I dreamed of him amid a group of assassins—the biographer who had preceded us both had coined the term "Nabokov Mafia," and here they were, in full regalia—at the Newark airport. Naïvely, I identified them to the customs officials as mercenaries. I woke from the chase scene in a cold sweat, wondering if the time had come to reread Janet Malcolm.

For the next months, Brian Boyd and I played what felt like an amiable, international, one-sided game of Go Fish. I was never sure if the game was rigged, or friendly, or fair, but I was relatively certain it was obligatory. In one configuration or another he supplied everything I asked for, though I was never able to shake my feeling that material was being handed on as recipes are in my family: with one ingredient missing. Nor was this concern entirely misplaced. In one case, a set of Nabokov's letters to Véra failed to turn up. So far as I knew, Boyd was the only person who had consulted those documents; his transcripts were my only hope. Generously he sent them on. They did not read like any other letters I knew from Vladimir to Véra; they felt anemic, dispassionate. I mentioned as much to Boyd. Were they unexpurgated? "Oh yes, silly of me—they were complete transcripts of slightly censored letters," he explained. Véra Nabokov had read them into his tape recorder, cutting the more personal material as she went. The transcriptions made no notes of the elisions. Dream exchanges aside, it was clear that Boyd understood my misgivings. At the end of 1997 I garnered the courage to ask if he might share a number of interviews. I hated to do so—my pride was as much at issue as the strain I was placing on his time—but I was years too late to quiz those subjects myself. Without Boyd's notes their voices were irretrievably lost. He sent me two care packages, adding in a few freebies. One of the photocopies was mostly blank. To it he had affixed a Post-it: "Yes, Stacy, this is all there was."

The biographer is a proprietary creature. More often than not he is on a first-name basis with his subject; he startles when others appear to be as well. The sense of identification may be what differentiates him most from the director restaging *Tosca,* resuscitating *Little Me.* The biographer is Morton Jimroy, the omniverous, tunnel-visioned scholar on the trail of an obscure, regional poet in Carol Shields's *Swann,* of whom it is said: "He wants Mrs. Swann's life. Every minute of it if he could have it. Every cup of tea that poor woman imbibed. Every thought in her tormented head. And what's more, he wants her death. Or some clue to it." He

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salivates when he gets close, as does Geoffrey Braithwaite in *Flaubert's Parrot,* tortured by the document-destroying Ed Winterton, who has followed a separate path to the same piece of narrow ground. And all the while he fears that he may actually be Somerset Maugham's Alroy Kear, bumbling about cluelessly, deaf to the sound of skeletons rattling in the cupboard, stumbling over a chronicler already so embedded in the story that no other biographer can get close. The lesson seems abundantly clear: In fiction, when biographer meets biographer, subject wins.

In dealing with Boyd, I tried for the most part not to think too much about Winterton and Jimroy and Kear boorishly crashing about, trampling life-stories they would never fathom. All the same, I felt my gracelessness acutely. And I wondered about the extent of Boyd's goodwill. I never knew how to read the long silences; I filled them in with Nabokov Mafia dreams. Mostly I felt as if Boyd were the seasoned first wife, rationing the wisdoms she passes on to the besotted third wife, a little cynical about that subsequent wife's attachment, not entirely certain if she wants her to succeed in a venture the pitfalls (and pleasures) of which are so familiar.

How not to start a conversation with a biographer: Ask him why the world needs another Saint-Exupéry, another Napoleon. If the biographer is working on a twentieth-century subject, chances are he will field this question from most of the people he interviews, many of whom have spoken with prior life-writers, perhaps even fielded identical questions. (To which they may have offered up identical recollections, not always as much of a comfort as it sounds.) Hermione Lee speaks eloquently to this irritation, describing the reception she met on the crowded Woolf trail as one of "wearied civility." Her sources had "been telling their Virginia Woolf stories for over fifty years, mostly committed to paper and hardened into irrefrangible form." Despite being reprimanded for his lack of originality, the biographer can't live without these voices, can't trust the previous biographer to have asked the right questions (or to have heard the answers), is always convinced that a new detail might emerge, needs—as Lee sees it—to *hear* the voices his subject heard, to get close to the fairy dust. Sometimes too close. Sometimes, in the process, the biographer learns things about his predecessors he would rather not know. A woman with whom one of my subjects had had a dalliance a half-century ago confided that the biographer had tried to crawl into bed with her after their interview. He had wanted to be close to the woman who had been close to the Master. Linda Davis quickly discovered that the early Crane chroniclers had been misled by fabricated letters, ingeniously composed by the first biographer on the scene.

As for the fundamental question, one develops an immunity to the yawns, the skepticism. Lee fielded the volleys of "Why another Woolf?"

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with a prepared speech but admits to real apprehension at the outset; maybe there *was* nothing new to say. Finally she armed herself with a laugh. "Just wait and see," she advised the naysayers. In the unenviable position of having to explain how her Oscar Wilde will differ from Ellmann's Pulitzer Prize–winning one, Barbara Belford has come up with perhaps the best—the only—answer. "What's different from Ellmann's book is that this is my book," she replies. David McCullough felt the same way when, about a year into his Theodore Roosevelt biography, Edmund Morris's *The Rise of Theodore Roosevelt* appeared, prompting McCullough's editor to suggest that he might care to reconsider his project. McCullough was undaunted. He and Edmund Morris were different people; their Roosevelts would be different as well. As he puts it, "Because someone has painted someone's portrait is no reason not to do so." Each biographer seems determined to disprove that classic definition of portraiture—"a likeness in which there is something wrong with the mouth"—even while he knows that there will one day be something problematic, insufficient, obsolete about the lower half of his own canvas.

But he still has to contend with what in Ellis's case were nineteen shelves of prior biographies. What to make of the mass of secondary material? Most of us attempt to let our work speak for itself, to brush our forebears aside as much as possible, bypassing the secondary material altogether. The Jefferson shelves in particular constitute a sort of Bermuda Triangle for biographers; if only out of an instinct for self-preservation, Ellis read very little there. It was his belief that anyone who actually waded through the material would never write anything. Hermione Lee felt she was saved—from her fellow chroniclers as well as from the morass of material—by a sort of blithe naïveté, likening herself to "a child in the sandpit, making her mudpies, and just getting on with things." McCullough read enough of Morris's Roosevelt to get a sense of the work, not so much that he might risk being influenced by it. Fred Kaplan, who, having written on Carlyle, Dickens, and James, clearly entertains few qualms about setting foot on well-charted terrain, worked on his Dickens in what he terms "creative suspension of the existence of the other biographies."

Unthink them we may, but those volumes are there, eschewed or acknowledged, shaping our texts. This is the anxiety of influence, biographically speaking. Most often the legacy is one of omission; the influence plays itself out most conspicuously in the form the work takes. The early biographer charts the steps and pieces together the story, leaving it to his successors to devise the variations. We wouldn't have Richard Holmes's *Footsteps* without Stevenson's and Shelley's more orthodox chroniclers; someone had to build Chartres before Monet could dissolve it in light. Ellis felt liberated by the wealth of Jefferson volumes; he was spared the burden of having to be comprehensive. He could search for

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his subject where he wanted, adopting a more episodic approach to the life, vaulting, for example, over the president's entire second term. He was perfectly happy not to have any new material to bring to the table. Lee describes the same phenomenon, diving into what she thought of as achronological pools instead of moving directly across the surface, writing what is in the end a more Woolfian book. The simultaneous biographer can work a similar effect. Lewis Dabney, whose life of Edmund Wilson has been in the works for fifteen years, is relieved to have been beaten to the finish line by Jeffrey Meyers. He is now free to write around the portions of the life that he finds less compelling, to shake off a certain amount of reportorial detail. This, too, is influence of a kind. The view is better, the narrative more artful and more contemporary, because we are standing on those nineteen shelves—which we prefer to think we have shunned altogether. No one would call this a team sport. But it does sometimes seem to take all the king's horses, and several biographers, to put a life back together again.

There is of course a great temptation—a too-great temptation—to gallop away from one's predecessors, to acknowledge their presence by swerving well out of their way. Even while he unthinks the prior materials, Kaplan defines himself as a revisionist biographer, reacting to major volumes that have been seen as definitive, of figures he feels cry out to be reassessed. One undertakes these subjects because one feels there is new ground to be covered, new light to be shed, a more honest narrative to be told. David Herbert Donald has said it best in discussing his 1996 *Lincoln:* There have been no new materials since the 1940s, but there are plenty of new questions. I read Brian Boyd's volumes before I began my Nabokov book and not again until I had finished. Even then I had to brace myself to do so. I didn't know what I feared finding more, concordance or dissonance—discovering that Boyd had left his fingerprints all over my story, or seeing that he had sketched an entirely different picture with the same materials. At the same time I knew he had to a great extent formulated my riddle. In writing the book I had felt I was slaloming across his beautifully delineated wake. The liberation, too, is an influence—as is the stalwart effort not to be influenced, the retreat to quiet ground.

How had Brian Boyd felt about having someone on his trail? Aghast, he admits, when he first heard, dismayed not only for himself but for his—our—mutual subjects. Véra Nabokov was the last person in the world who would have wanted a biography written of her, he thought. His response was as much protective as territorial: How could I do this to her? The second reaction was no more reassuring. A woman writing from Véra's point of view, he allowed in a recent conversation, "would need to paint Nabokov as a chauvinistic ogre who exploited his talented wife and frustrated her creative talent." And as for intellectual biography, there

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simply was no book in Véra Nabokov. Lurking too was the apprehension that I might turn up that crucial case of elusive documents, an abiding fear that Brian and I will now jointly transfer to the next man on the scene. All of this Brian was able to feel without for a minute believing biography, or any scholarship, to be a definitive enterprise.

Well, I ask him, now that we have come this far together, *did* he leave out an ingredient? At first, admits Brian, he had been reticent with me. But gradually he had wanted to offer up more. And he had had a sense of time pressing; he realized he really ought to review his interviews to find what might be relevant to my work. Had he not helped when he did, he would have felt deeply ungenerous later. As for the dream, he probably wouldn't have mentioned it had he still felt actively anxious on my account; by the time he wrote of the sleep invasion, he found it amusing. All the same, he offers up what he sees as a fitting curse: He lives in wait of my being shanghaied by the next Nabokov chronicler. This he hardly needs to do. We all know where the life-writers' game of Rock, Paper, Scissors ends. Having pursued, courted, ignored, sanctified, decapitated him, biographer is reviewed by previous biographer.

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When Germs Travel

HOWARD MARKEL

History teaches us that society has no shortage of means available to dehumanize "undesirable" groups. The grave risks of this process are magnified when combined with the threat of infectious disease. At such moments, rhetorical scapegoating may be transformed into a mentality of quarantine. Not only does the disease become the "enemy"; so, too, do the human beings (and their contacts) who have encountered the microbe in question. A common symptom of the quarantine mentality is to do everything possible to prevent the spread of an epidemic disease, often neglecting the human or medical needs of those labeled infectious.

The annals of human migration have long been intertwined with the history of infectious disease. As humans have roamed and conquered, so have the germs that travel within them. One of the most striking results of the international exploration that began in antiquity and reached its zenith during the Renaissance and Enlightenment eras was the progressive and deadly spread of communicable diseases around the globe. The concept of quarantine—shutting the gates of a town or port to all foreign persons and cargo, and forbidding all residents to leave, in order to stem the tide of an epidemic—was a response to the outbreak of bubonic plague, known as the black death, which killed a fourth of Europe's population in the fourteenth century. In the American experience, one of the most infamous examples of the way germs can travel was the ravag-

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ing of Indian populations by the many infections that arrived with explorers from the Old World.

In its relatively brief history, the United States has episodically experienced deadly epidemics that sometimes originated from within its borders (diphtheria, measles, typhus fever, poliomyelitis, smallpox) and sometimes came from without (cholera, plague, yellow fever). But regardless of the germ's origin, or even of the scientific understanding of disease transmission, a consistent scapegoat for public health crises in American history has been the newly arrived immigrant. Early nineteenth-century Irish and German newcomers were supplanted only a few generations later by Jews, East Europeans, Italians, Asians, and Mexicans. Manifestations of immigrant scapegoating, unhappily, have continued to the present.

The United States welcomed more than twenty-five million immigrants to its shores between 1880 and 1924. This great wave of American immigration remains one of the most significant pathways of population movement in world history. Not all Americans greeted the newcomers with open arms. The most frequently sounded objection to immigration during this period was an economic one—the perennial fear that immigrants would push Americans out of their jobs, drive down wages, and overuse an already strapped patchwork system of public assistance. A close second objection was tied to racist sentiment, often expressed as apprehension about untoward political beliefs (socialism or anarchism) or the presumed inability of new groups to assimilate into American society. But the most insidious objection that has appeared across our history involves the issue of safeguarding the nation's public health against infections potentially imported by immigrants.

Nowhere was the nexus between human migration and infectious disease more clearly drawn than at the immigration reception centers developed by the United States Public Health Service at the turn of the century. And no other American port matched the commerce or passenger flow of New York Harbor. More than 75 percent of all immigrants coming to America during this era had NEW YORK CITY stamped on their steamship tickets. Steerage ships carrying boatloads of newcomers first stopped at the Quarantine Station on Hoffman Island, just off the Narrows in Lower New York Bay, and were inspected for evidence of quarantinable diseases—plague, cholera, yellow fever, smallpox, typhus fever, and leprosy. From there, barges took the immigrants to Ellis Island.

The Ellis Island Immigration Center opened in 1892, the same year New York City was struck by immigrant-imported epidemics of typhus fever and cholera. Between that year and 1924, when a series of restrictive laws all but halted immigration for forty-one years, millions of immigrants were scrutinized by uniformed federal officials and physicians using mea-

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sures of physical, mental, and economic health. To be sure, there were good reasons for developing a careful process of inspection. Protection against infectious disease was just one of a number of public health, economic, and social concerns. Yet because the process was grounded on the assumption that the immigrants seeking entry were, in the words of Statue of Liberty poet Emma Lazarus, "wretched refuse," cultural insensitivities along "the Line"—the queue of immigrants at Ellis Island—were bound to occur. And occur they did, especially on those busy days when more than five thousand had to be inspected.

It is important to note that of the millions seeking entry each year, relatively few were actually rejected for medical reasons. In fact, if one were to compute the average number of immigrants debarred for medical conditions between 1892 and 1924, it would amount to less than one percent of all those who sought entry each year. A far more common reason for exclusion by the Ellis Island inspectors was abject poverty (officially, "Likely to Become a Public Charge"), followed by evidence that the immigrant was a criminal, a contract laborer, or a member of "the immoral classes" (that is, a prostitute).

As a brash graduate student, I once cited the statistics on medical rejections to the late historian and social critic Irving Howe. He brusquely waved me away—much as my Yiddish-speaking grandfather would tell me to *Gay aveck!* (Go away!) when I bothered him with an impertinent question. "It doesn't matter. It doesn't matter at all," Howe intoned, "because everyone knew someone—or someone who knew someone—who was quarantined or sent back because of a terrible disease." Of course, he was right. In the diaries and memoirs of immigrants arriving during this period, one repeatedly encounters evidence of the intense fear of the Ellis Island physicians, of the medical examination, and of the deportation that might follow. Matters between the American doctor and the immigrant patient were rarely much better once the immigrant settled into his or her new home.

In 1892, for example, a deadly epidemic of typhus fever erupted along New York City's Lower East Side. Almost every case was directly traced to a group of East European Jewish immigrants who had just arrived in a dilapidated steerage steamship. Many Americans were already concerned about the social repercussions of the hundreds of thousands of impoverished Jews fleeing czarist persecutions that year, and the typhus epidemic did nothing to allay their qualms. The epidemiological convenience of the situation is hard to deny: one dreaded infectious disease, one social scapegoat, one neighborhood, even one ship that brought the "vectors of disease" from the Old World to the New. And while no official expressions of anti-Semitism emanated from the New York City Health Department, its officials' strategies and actions differed decidedly when dealing

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with people within this particular circle of contagion. In quiet times, the relationship between the municipal public health doctors and the immigrant community—divided by differences in language, class, and social status—was at best ambivalent and at worst contentious and confrontational. In the event of a real public health emergency, like an epidemic, health department doctors often came down on the lives of the immigrants with resounding force. The most common tactics of the sanitary police included forcible evictions from lodging houses, beatings with billy clubs, destruction of pushcarts (the slender support system of many immigrant peddlers), burning of possessions that had been judged by the health inspectors to harbor the seeds of infectious disease, and the harshest restriction of all, quarantine on a distant island, far away from friends, family, and support.

In the late fall of 1891, a group of East European Jews living in a tiny shtetl in Russia's Pale of Settlement were evicted by the provincial governor. Although these people and their ancestors had lived in this hamlet for generations, they had little choice but to follow the orders of the armed soldiers who came to announce their eviction. Within a few weeks, the band of tailors, butchers, draymen, laborers, and their families arrived at Odessa on the Black Sea, but they were no more welcome there than they had been in their shtetl. After a narrow escape from czarist soldiers in Odessa and a nomadic trek through Constantinople, Marseilles, and Naples, the exiled Jews finally found passage on the Febre Line steamer *Massilia* and sailed for New York on January 2, 1892. The ship was small and easily tossed about in the rough Atlantic waters. The fastest ships of that era made the crossing in less than seven days; it took the *Massilia* twenty-eight.

Accommodations for immigrants on steamships like the *Massilia* can only be described as atrocious. In the words of one long-forgotten Congressional investigation of steerage conditions, conducted in 1911, they were "filthy . . . inadequate . . . almost unendurable." The *Massilia*'s steerage compartments consisted of long tiers of berths on either side of the lowest deck of the ship. In the center of this cramped area were benches and tables where the immigrants took their meals, often consisting of rotten potatoes, stale black bread, decaying herring, and a paltry ration of rancid butter. Alongside the tables were troughs filled with salt water for bathing and personal hygiene. Drinking water was doled from a bucket and often distributed by a communal cup or ladle. The steerage passengers breathed fresh air only on the rare clear days when they went up to the open deck, huddling together to protect themselves from the cold North Atlantic winter. As one U.S. Marine Hospital surgeon observed the day the ship sailed into New York Harbor, "The *Massilia* is one of the best ships afloat for the propagation of typhus fever."

Although all the East European Jews from the *Massilia* were examined

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by doctors at the New York Quarantine Station *and* at Ellis Island on January 30, 1892, not one was detained or excluded for medical reasons. After passing their medical examinations and satisfying the inquiries of immigration officers, the bedraggled immigrants were released under the bond of the United Hebrew Charities, which arranged for temporary lodging on New York's Lower East Side. Only a few weeks later, the *Massilia* Jews were identified in newspapers across the nation as the source of a severe typhus epidemic in New York.

Among the many families who had sailed on the *Massilia* were the Mermers: Isaac, aged forty-eight; his wife, Fayer, forty; and their five children, ranging in age from seven to seventeen. During their first two weeks in *Di Goldine Medina* (the Golden Land), the Mermers slept on the floor of a tiny room in a tenement house referred to by the New York press as the "Hotel de Russia." They shared their cramped and dirty space with twelve other immigrants. Early on the morning of February 12, Isaac awoke to the screams of Fayer, who was sweating and dazed. There was a curious purplish-red rash on her body. Fayer's cries were heard by the landlord, who called for a doctor named Leo Dann. Dr. Dann, who spoke Yiddish and lived on the Lower East Side, was a young contract physician hired by the United Hebrew Charities to look after the health of the *grine kuzines* (greenhorns). He was unsure of the exact diagnosis, but the fact that several other boarders had similar symptoms prompted him to notify the health department. A legion of black ambulances soon arrived at the tenement house, and a battery of sanitary police sprang out to search the house for the contagious. In full view of her helpless husband and terrified children, Fayer Mermer was dragged out of the Hotel de Russia kicking and screaming—partially in response to the actions of the armed sanitary police, partially out of a fever-induced delirium.

The organism that causes typhus, *Rickettsia prowazekii*, is carried by body lice. The fevers it produces in humans are absolutely incendiary. With a temperature as high as 105 degrees, the typhus patient can become crazed and delirious. Sir Charles Murchison, the leading medical authority on the disease in the late nineteenth century, described the "madness of typhus fever" vividly: "the patient shouts, talks incoherently, and is more or less violent; if not restrained, he will get up and walk around the room, or even throw himself from an open window." Fayer Mermer's worst fears, whether generated by the infection or by previous episodes of persecution, were soon realized. She died six days later, becoming the first victim of the 1892 epidemic. Forty-five more would succumb to typhus over the next few weeks.

After the initial public health roundup that morning, Isaac Mermer and his children tried to escape from the Essex Street house to avoid the public health doctors. They were quickly apprehended by the sanitary

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police and quarantined on North Brother Island in the East River, best known as the long-term home of "Typhoid Mary" Mallon. Even by the standards of 1892, the quarantine island was desolate, inadequate, and, in times of epidemics, dangerously overcrowded. All the surviving Mermers recovered from typhus that winter and were returned to the Lower East Side by late April. But from a public health perspective there is something troubling about their case histories. Isaac and his children *did* develop typhus during their stay on North Brother Island. If the Mermers contracted the disease *before* their arrest and quarantine, their potential flight from the Lower East Side could have carried the infection to other parts of the city.

Throughout the epidemic, the health department tacitly assumed that typhus fever had been directly imported from Europe to New York by the *Massilia* Jews, even though outbreaks of typhus were frequent in New York City during the late nineteenth century. Dr. Cyrus Edson, the health department's sanitary inspector who organized the quarantine efforts, may have acted toward the immigrants with what one historian has called a "mixture of sympathy and contempt," but his disease-control methods were effective. By the end of April 1892, all those with typhus had been isolated, and no new cases developed. The epidemic was extinguished in a matter of eight weeks. A glowing tribute to Edson in the *New York Times* congratulated him for "averting a pestilence." More specific was the *New York Tribune*'s conclusion that "the isolation of all Jewish suspects and their stringent quarantine . . . was responsible for the success." In February 1893 city health officials were honored at a testimonial dinner and reception for four hundred people, in recognition of their "brilliant service." Fewer than seventy-five blocks from this feast at Jaeger's Hall on Madison Avenue, Isaac Mermer ate bread and herring with his five children in the tiny flat they now rented on the Lower East Side. The Mermers' views on the practice of public health in New York City would have differed markedly from those of the celebrants who gathered to toast Dr. Edson and his colleagues.

Edson, an able writer and frequent contributor to popular magazines and newspapers, informed the citizens of New York that the typhus epidemic and similar public health crises were largely due to the devious and dangerous behaviors of newly arrived East European Jewish and Italian immigrants who "hide in closets, burrow in cellars, run away, do anything to avoid the visit of a physician and lie with the most magnificent elaboration." Many Americans might have agreed with Edson's theory of disease causation, but to an immigrant like Isaac Mermer, who had watched his wife being dragged off to the quarantine island and was doubtless fearful for his own life, fleeing or hiding from the health department made good sense.

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Even if one agrees with Isaac's motivations for flight, however, the possibility that he was incubating a case of typhus fever and was temporarily successful at eluding the health department doctors may have contributed to the further spread of a serious infectious disease. And Isaac and his children were not alone in hiding from city health officials that winter. The roundup of Jewish "typhus suspects" cost the City of New York weeks of effort and thousands of dollars. The more infected people who fled, of course, the greater the number of new cases. Here is a clear historical example in which hostile attitudes and policies directed at immigrants and enacted by a municipal health department potentially detracted from, rather than protected, the public health. To be sure, the typhus epidemic would have been much more severe if the health department had made no effort at quarantine. On the other hand, there might well have been fewer new cases of typhus after the health department's initial discovery if its methods had not been so intimidating that many immigrants were frightened into noncompliance. Assessing blame may be a common human foible, but when it informs public health policies perceived by those targeted to be punitive or dangerous, that policy is at great risk of failing to protect the health of a community.

The Mermers' story is just one of millions that form the intricate mosaic of the American immigration experience, but it puts a human face on some of the problems that may arise when issues of immigration and infectious disease collide. With the passage of the Immigration Act of 1965 and its progeny of laws throughout the 1980s, we have opened our gates to new immigrants from Asia, Africa, Europe, South America, and the Caribbean. Diminishing economic resources and illegal immigration, especially in the "border states" of California, Florida, and Texas, have become concerns that press on our nation's immigration policies. Today, more than a century after the Mermers' ordeal, we also find a return to the perception of immigrants as dangerous vectors of disease, and to social policies that seem focused more on immigrant scapegoating than on sound protection of public health.

For example, recently proposed legislation, such as the California Illegal Alien Statute of 1994 (better known as Proposition 187) and the since-revised "Welfare Reform" Act of the 1996 Congress, specifically excluded aliens, both illegal and legal, from most non-emergency medical services. California's statute, which is still being contested in the federal court system, is especially punitive, in that it mandates that all health-care providers report to the authorities for deportation any patient they suspect to be an illegal immigrant. Such a law drives a potentially lethal wedge into the confidential relationship between physician and patient that has been deemed essential since the age of Hippocrates.

Now, imagine the potential plight of an illegal immigrant worker in

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southern California in the late twentieth century. Lured across the Mexican border by significantly higher wages and unscrupulous Americans who knowingly break the law to hire him or her, the illegal immigrant is likely to live in squalid and often unhealthy conditions. Suppose, now, that this same immigrant contracts tuberculosis.

The "white plague," incidentally, does not always come to our nation in the bodies of immigrants; there is already plenty of TB in the United States. Tuberculosis is an airborne infection that is spread by an ill person coughing infectious material, the tubercle bacilli, into the air. The microbes are then inhaled by a susceptible person. Repeated and extended exposure to someone with tuberculosis spreads the disease. The illegal immigrant, coughing but not obviously ill, does not seek medical attention, knowing that he or she may be refused treatment or even deported. A number of recent studies of immigrant health behaviors have documented that many legal and illegal immigrants are avoiding health care providers in California because they are afraid of stigmatization, of legal repercussions, of having their children pulled out of school, and of inadequate or harmful medical care. With the growing impression among many immigrants that more punitive regulations are to come, this avoidance behavior is all too likely to spread to the other border states. Thus the illegal immigrant continues his undocumented existence, potentially spreading a deadly infectious disease to others, both foreign and native born.

This thought experiment becomes more frightening when one contemplates the appearance of far more rapid killers such as Ebola virus or bubonic plague, both distinct possibilities in a world shrunken by rapid international travel and burgeoning human migration; or the rise of drug-resistant strains of common infectious diseases we once tamed with an arsenal of antibiotics and vaccines. The critical question, again, is whether punitive public health measures that block access to medical care for immigrants can be expected to protect, or to worsen, the state of the nation's public health.

One can discern a great deal about late-nineteenth-century American society by the way it treated the immigrants it both sheltered and shunned. No matter how objective and scientific the immigration officials and public health doctors believed their procedures to be, their ideas and theories were forced through an intellectual strainer that assumed a superiority over the immigrants they were charged with inspecting. The mistakes of our predecessors are, of course, much clearer to us than our own can be. And although each time a new epidemic erupts, a different play with different scenes and actors emerges, we can find the past dramas of epidemics and scapegoating culturally embedded in our contemporary responses to these dilemmas. This is not to say that we can reduce all of society's complex problems to Shakespeare's pithy axiom "what's

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past is prologue." Yet there are powerful lessons to be learned from the past as we struggle with the present. We need to pay close attention to stories like that of the Mermers as we work to develop contemporary immigration and public health policies based on reason and sound data, rather than on such knee-jerk responses as anti-immigrant scapegoating or, for that matter, blind humanitarian support for wide-open immigration.

The pathogenic microbe as an agent of illness and death is the ultimate social leveler. It binds all humans who are susceptible to the germ, and, when transmitted through a filter of fear, has the power to divide. The combination of germs and immigrants in American history has commonly resulted in the mounting of a quarantine effort by those charged with protecting the public health. We have, let us hope, learned from these episodes that adequate medical care and facilities—as well as attention to individual rights, economic and recreational needs, cultural and religious differences, and the emotional difficulties that patients may experience in isolation—are elements as essential as the hue and cry for the roundup of victims. These human considerations, unfortunately, can reduce but never cure the many problems arising from the experience of quarantine. Yet they remain important considerations. For those stricken with infectious disease, the burden of illness is wearing enough without added layers of social separation. As we confront new situations in which human migration intertwines with infectious disease, we will do well to learn from both the successes and the failures of the past. How we attempt to handle future conflicts will be as much a measure of our society's perceptions of illness, human rights, and the dignity of the individual as a measure of our medical, scientific, and administrative expertise.

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A Verb from the Earth

VIVIAN SHIPLEY

It's not sting of cilantro or bite of fresh mint but basil
that makes tomatoes sing. No need for lemon,
anise, cinnamon, dark opal, or purple ruffle to
show your sophistication. Plain old sweet basil will do.

History offers you some clues: Chinese cultivated it by
the tenth century; Hindu gods Krishna and Vishnu
regarded it as sacred; and in Greek, *basilikon* meant
royal. The dueling emotions of love and hate surrounding

basil since ancient Rome are found in Keats's heroine,
Isabella, who buried her murdered beloved's head
in a pot of basil and watered it with her tears.
There are easier ways to grow it. In *To Emilia Viviani,*

the distraught lover received a gift of mignonette and
sweet basil *Embleming love and health, which*
never yet / In the same wreath might be. Would
Shelley have revised this line if Mary had known basil

adds a warm peppery flash to soft macerated berries or
that, like potatoes, basil is an aphrodisiac? Basil
is sunny, basil is affable. Tear it by hand and eat
it raw. Add garlic, pine nuts, olive oil, and Parmesan,

pound basil in a mortar for your lips that will *O,* sucking
linguine dripping with pesto. Not just an echo,
more than an herb, basil is bold. Rows may replace high
school bands on Memorial Day. Words of warning: basil

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ingested can be tumblers clicking open the past if memory
    can be banked in a safe. Don't chop, boil, overwhelm
    in sauces. Essential oils in microscopic hairlike sacks,
when exposed to heat, heavy knives, or acidity, can

dissipate as dreams do. Like love, as stunning to your senses
    as sweet honeysuckle or lilac with its heart-shaped
    leaves, the smell of basil, the taste of basil never had
a thing to do with words, can't be extracted like your teeth.

Vivian Shipley is the Connecticut State University Distinguished Professor and the editor of *Connecticut Review*. Her most recent collection of poems is *Devil's Lane*.

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Deputy Finds Dean's Tombstone on Highway

—*St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, July 18, 1998

JIM BARNES

Over forty years ago, I saw you
in my mirror mornings before the slow
days dawned. Working the hoot-owl shift miles
above Bohemia and in love with smiles
anyone gave, I was you to the core,
looked like you even then. Our names the same
signaled something I tried my best to grasp.
Maybe I have it now. But for you, Jimmy,
I would never have known the freedom of road
and will. I was a slow rebel, double
for you in the smoky taverns of Oregon
where lost women and mournful men spilled their
lives on Saturday nights. You taught me how
to desire and what the desiring is for:
departure. The setting out must go on
and on. So I think of this these decades
late after reading the Reuters release.
In July there are shivers in Fairmount.
Someone's life somewhere is about to change,
the tailgate down and the bed empty and scarred.
Your name, our name, Jimbo, flat on the road
sliding west with traffic: that's the way it
always ought to be this far from Eden
or South Bend. This far from the lumbering
towns or lots full of OICs, I see you
still, the standing shadow in every ditch
or curve someone sometime did not make
in a momentary reach for misguided
glory. The pickup reaches home toward
midnight. The two men, in late middle age,
lean their arms on the rim of the empty bed
and gaze into the nothing they have carried
to the sanctuary of the deep Indiana fields.

Jim Barnes is the editor of *The Chariton Review*. He is the author of *Paris*, a volume of poetry, and *On Native Ground*, an autobiography, which won the 1998 American Book Award.

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The Plastic Pink Flamingo

A Natural History

JENNIFER PRICE

Five years ago, I visited the Union Products factory, the birthplace of the plastic pink flamingo. It nestles among a flock of plastics factories in Leominster, Massachusetts, on Route 117 west of Boston. I have come to believe, and would like to persuade you, that the blow-molding department in the basement, where they still melt polyethylene crystals with pink dye and extrude the hot pink plastic into flamingo-shaped molds, can be just as useful a place to search for the deepest meanings of nature as the most remote wilds of the Rockies, where I have also looked.

Since then, to plumb my nature-loving instincts and the fierce attachments to nature harbored by many members of my generation, I have been tracing the flamingo's history through the annals of landscape architecture, south Florida, middle-class inventions, Las Vegas, fifties styles, sixties rebellions, organic gardening, John Waters movies, Elvis, wilderness areas, Andy Warhol prints, the Culture Wars, and my fellow baby boomers' thirty-year march to economic dominance. At some point, I began to listen carefully to the stories people told me. My graduate-school adviser heard a National Public Radio report on a kidnapped pair of flamingos that sent back postcards from the Eiffel Tower. Friends had stolen the birds off lawns on drunken late-

Jennifer Price, a freelance writer in Los Angeles, recently completed a doctorate in history at Yale University. This essay is adapted from *Flight Maps: Adventures with Nature in Modern America,* which is being published this May by Basic Books.

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night outings in college. A *New Yorker* editor had a famous collection. My roommate's traveling partner had taken a flamingo named Eudora backpacking, mountain-biking, and cross-country skiing through the White Mountains, the Arctic, and the Sierras before forgetting it one summer in a cabin at Donner Pass.

And so, by degrees, I became cathected to the plastic bird that the nature writer Terry Tempest Williams has branded "our unnatural link to the natural world."

The plastic flamingo was invented at Union Products in 1957 by a young designer named Don Featherstone, but its provenance—the prehistory of lawn ornamentation—can be traced back many centuries. I'll begin in mid-eighteenth-century England. At that time, a revolutionary English school of landscape architects created a "natural" lawn aesthetic that would rival the "artificial" seventeenth-century gardens of Versailles as a paradigm and cast a great shadow forward onto American landscapes, American lawns, and the do's and don't's of American yard art. Led by the great landscape architect Lancelot "Capability" Brown, the new designers turned the estates of English aristocrats into rolling expanses of meadows, trees, lakes, and streams. At Versailles, the royal architects had lined the perfect parterres with quantities of dragons, satyrs, swans, wolves, nymphs, and Greek gods. But as Brown and his minions blotted out geometry from the English countryside—a near-complete feat by the mid-1800s—they gave lawn ornaments a tenuous welcome. Their bastions of nature featured rustic hermitages and a modest handful of stag and dog statues. They much preferred to deploy real animals, such as sheep, cattle, and—best of all—native deer.

And yet, to turn an estate into nature required great efforts of human intervention. The architects built hills and dug lakes. They planted trees by the tens of thousands, chopped down grovesful of others, added dead trees back in for effect, and cropped vast acreages of new grass. They made rivers bend. They made sunlight dapple. In some cases, they evicted longtime tenant farmers and razed their villages. They set out, as Brown's famous protégé Humphrey Repton enthusiastically put it, to "conceal every interference of art, however expensive." It is tricky to say whether the "nature" they left behind contained less artifice than the perfect avenues and precision topiary of Versailles, or whether it required less human labor and capital to maintain. The architects created not nature itself, but an idea, a *definition* of nature as a place that is free of humans and human artifice.

A seedbed of urbanization, industrialization, and modern market capitalism, eighteenth- and early-nineteenth-century England also saw the privatization and enclosure of once-common agricultural lands. Many people began to define nature as a realm that was as yet untransformed—

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not the parts of the natural world that humans use or change, but the parts that they *do not* use. Nature was not urban and had no industrial factories. It was a place without economic activities. It was a refuge from social upheaval. As a Place Out There, it was fast coming to represent everything that life in early-modern England was not. Above all, people in the throes of becoming modern appealed to nature as a timeless source of authority. In the late 1700s and early 1800s, Hume and Burke propounded "natural" theories of moral philosophy and politics. Adam Smith described the new market-based economy as a "natural" set of laws. Gainsborough painted a "natural" aesthetic. Wordsworth sought aesthetic and spiritual truths in nature. Even etiquette manuals lauded the value of "naturalness" in manners and posture. And Capability Brown made the landscape an idea you could walk around in.

In fact, what could claim the authority of nature more effectively than ownership of a vast expanse of it? Only wealthy squires could enjoy the benefits of this definition—landed aristocrats who could take prime agricultural acreage out of production and urban merchants who could purchase country retreats. The urban poor and working classes couldn't afford to travel out of the cities. And rural peasants could hardly afford to treat the landscape as a non-farming-or-hunting zone. A Brown-designed estate made as definite a statement of social power as Versailles, only it did it by declaring that wealth and status were *natural.* Of course, no one in England, during that era of explosive economic growth, was using and changing nature more than the wealthy elites. And much of the future history of this idea would unfold as a battle among the more monied social classes over exactly who would get to claim the authority of nature, and for what purposes.

The plastic pink flamingo was still two centuries away. Meanwhile, in the late 1700s, French landowners were hiring English architects to convert their exquisite gardens into Nature. Across the Atlantic, American landowners such as Thomas Jefferson took to the English aesthetic like birds to the sky. Americans, after all, have always embraced a vision of nature both as countermodern and as a source of social and political authority—from Jefferson's pastoral ideal, which wed rural roots to republican independence and virtue, to Thoreau's faith in wilderness as an antidote to overcivilization. From the Puritans' "city on a hill" to myths of the American West to the remarkably literal Mount Rushmore, Americans have made nature meaningful as a powerful source of authority for national identity.

The English school found its great American apostle in Andrew Jackson Downing, a nurseryman in upstate New York. In the 1840s, he made meadows roll, streams meander, and trees clump irregularly on country estates throughout the Hudson Valley, where the Hudson River school of

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landscape painters committed similar visions to canvas. And he approached the questi n of lawn ornaments circumspectly. "Vases," "rustic baskets," and "other harmonious accessories": Downing deployed these only near the manor. A bit farther away, he planted "rockwork" and wooden "moss houses." However, on the farther reaches of one's lands, human artifice had to vanish entirely. A vase way out there, he admonished, "[does] violence to our reason or taste." At his own residence in Newburgh, Downing instructed his all-too-visible grounds staff to use "invisible hands" to mow the lawns at night.

His real passion, however, was to downsize the English principles for smaller estates. In the democratic United States, a growing middle class owned property, too, and Downing was from a middle-class background himself. How should Americans with less land—he recommended at least fifty acres but consented to work with ten or twenty—"render their places tasteful and agreeable?" "We answer," he said, "*by attempting only the simple and natural;* and the unfailing way to secure this, is by employing as leading features only trees and grass." Downing preached restraint and naturalness above all else. He generally referred to them as "taste." "An humble cottage with sculptured vases," for example, "would be in bad taste."

What *is* "taste"? You can have taste in clothes, wine, furniture, art, decor—almost anything you purchase. The concept emerged with a vengeance in the early 1800s, as spreading wealth and new mass-production technologies equipped the growing numbers of urban middle-class consumers with the resources and tools to decorate and accessorize. Taste, you could say, is a style of consumerism. It is also a statement of identity—and it's exactly in this era that American identity became inextricably connected with consumerism. Taste was, to some degree, an upper-class injunction of restraint that cautioned the new consumers not to presume to be truly wealthy. And yet the middle classes rapidly made taste their own and counterdeployed it to reject the showy excesses of the rich. If you consumed tastefully, you advertised that, unlike the working classes, you had abundant resources to buy things—but that you exercised the middle-class American virtue, and the admirable market-economy ethic, of self-control.

But is good taste supposed to be a middle-class style of consumerism? No, it just *is:* a universally superior sensibility (or so goes the assumption) that would logically turn to nature, that bedrock of American identity, to legitimize its aesthetic of simplicity. And what better place to prove one's good taste than on the bit of nature that was closest at hand—one's own front lawn?

The yard-art wars escalated exactly as fast as the suburbs spread outward. After the Civil War, Downing's student Frederick Law Olmsted—the legendary architect of New York's Central Park who fiercely promulgated parks and lawns as refuges from urban stress—retrofitted Downing's prin-

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ciples to the scale of the largish lawn. He converted Nature into the rolling, tree-dotted, upper-middle-class neighborhood. In the 1880s, Frank Jesup Scott, yet another Downing student, adapted the guidelines for medium-sized lawns. In his do-it-yourself manual, *The Art of Beautifying Home Grounds of Small Extent,* he advised callow landowners to "avoid spotting your lawn with . . . plaster or marble images of any kind, or those lilliputian caricatures." His rules left space for grass, a tree or two, and a few flowers close to the door. This remains the archetypal vision for the middle-class suburban front lawn.

The homeowners, however, were getting restless. In the 1920s they bought cast-aluminum animals. In the 1930s do-it-yourselfers made deer, rabbits, and frogs out of cement, the Depression material of choice. Each new decade brought more suburbs, more lawns, and cheaper mass-produced ornaments. The down-classing of lawn art was well under way.

These trends culminated (or bottomed out) after World War II in the dual explosions of suburbs and plastics. In the 1950s developers plowed an average of three thousand acres of new suburbs each day. Many lower-middle-class and some working-class Americans earned enough to buy single-family houses: ranches, split-levels, Cape Cods, Tudors, Colonial revivals. It was the era of upward mobility, of undreamed-of new levels of consumerism, and of the baby boom, when my own parents moved into a tiny house just outside the St. Louis city limits, and four children and five years later—in 1960, the year I was born—traded up to a spacious French colonial farther out.

The plastics industries, energized by wartime technologies, set out to accessorize the split-levels inside and out. Nylon, rayon, vinyl, polyester, Lucite, Plexiglas, Saran, polyethylene. The companies could make almost anything cheaply with the new petroleum-based plastics, and did: radios, polyester pants, Barbie dolls, hula hoops, "walnut" paneling, "leather" car interiors, vinyl wallpaper, Tupperware, Naugahyde lounge chairs. "Better Things for Better Living Through Chemistry," a DuPont slogan went. After 1946, Union Products manufactured "Plastics for the Lawn": dogs, frogs, ducks, and a two-dimensional flamingo that sold well.

In 1956 the company hired Don Featherstone, a recent art-school graduate, who for the sake of accuracy on his first project—a three-dimensional molded-polyethylene bird named Charlie the Duck—spent six months sketching a live model in his studio. In 1957 Featherstone designed a three-dimensional flamingo, which sold even better than the flat version. Union Products retailed its wares at Sears, Woolworth's, and Ben Franklin's. "Flamingo pink," said the 1957 Sears catalogue. "Place in garden, lawn, to beautify landscape." "Lifelike." "Lovely." In the decades ahead, the flamingo would only rarely outsell the duck—but it would become far more famous.

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The bird took up residence in working-class subdivisions. Middle-class suburbanites gave it a wide berth. A fifties taste literature flourished: *Good Taste Costs No More; How Good Is Your Taste?* And on medium-sized lawns, Nature—and a lawn that advertised leisure, refuge, and economic independence—mandated the near-total "grass, trees, a few flowers" ban on artifice. Swing sets, gardens, and barbecue pits were all consigned to the backyard. An absence of human life remains a signature feature of the middle-class suburban front lawn. Of course, a second aspect of these lawns is that great investments of money and labor, and a vast herbicide industry, are required to maintain them. Like a Capability Brown masterpiece, this no-artifice zone of nature actively hides much of the abundant human artifice that the homeowner uses to create it.

On a small lawn, you'd have to scale down to grass and perhaps a tulip or two. And you had precious little space in which to exercise restraint. A plain lawn in front of a large house stated "affluent, but tasteful." But an unadorned swatch in front of a very small house said "inexpensive, and can't afford more." Below a certain level of wealth, taste ceases to operate. Working-class consumers generally favored more conspicuous strategies to landscape their pieces of the American Dream. They emphasized, rather than underplayed, their human presence. They found ample space for artifice. Many planted their lawns with squirrels, frogs, lighthouses, windmills, and flamingos. In Catholic neighborhoods, the plastic creatures became a logical extension of the religious figures that immigrants in the cities had placed on their porches and in their window boxes (though as second- and third-generation Catholics moved to middle-class enclaves farther out, many would reject their parents' lawn displays with embarrassment, or at least move their own to the backyard). Sears did a brisk business in pink flamingos, at only $2.76 a pair.

When the pink flamingo splashed into the fifties market, it staked two major claims to boldness. First, it was a *flamingo.* Since the 1930s, vacationing Americans had been flocking to Florida and returning home with flamingo souvenirs. In the 1910s and 1920s, Miami Beach's first grand hotel, the Flamingo, had made the bird synonymous with wealth and pizzazz. After a 1926 hurricane leveled Millionaire's Row, developers built hundreds of more modest hotels to cater to an eager middle class served by new train lines—and in South Beach, especially, architects employed the playful Art Deco style, replete with bright pinks and flamingo motifs.

This was a little ironic, since Americans had hunted flamingos to extinction in Florida in the late 1800s, for plumes and meat. But no matter. In the 1950s, the new interstates would draw working-class tourists down, too. Back in New Jersey, the Union Products flamingo inscribed one's lawn emphatically with Florida's cachet of leisure and extravagance.

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The bird acquired an extra fillip of boldness, too, from the direction of Las Vegas—the flamboyant oasis of instant riches that the gangster Benjamin "Bugsy" Siegel had conjured from the desert in 1946 with his Flamingo Hotel. Anyone who has seen Las Vegas knows that a flamingo stands out in a desert even more strikingly than on a lawn. In the 1950s, namesake Flamingo motels, restaurants, and lounges cropped up across the country like a line of semiotic sprouts.

And the flamingo was *pink*—a second and commensurate claim to boldness. The plastics industries of the fifties favored flashy colors, which Tom Wolfe called "the new electrochemical pastels of the Florida littoral: tangerine, broiling magenta, livid pink, incarnadine, fuchsia demure, Congo ruby, methyl green." The hues were forward-looking rather than old-fashioned, just right for a generation, raised in the Depression, that was ready to celebrate its new affluence. And as Karal Ann Marling has written, the "sassy pinks" were "the hottest color of the decade." Washing machines, cars, and kitchen counters proliferated in passion pink, sunset pink, and Bermuda pink. In 1956, right after he signed his first recording contract, Elvis Presley bought a pink Cadillac.

Why, after all, call the birds "pink flamingos"—as if they could be blue or green? The plastic flamingo is a hotter pink than a real flamingo, and even a real flamingo is brighter than anything else around it. There are five species, all of which feed in flocks on algae and invertebrates in saline and alkaline lakes in mostly warm habitats around the world. The people who have lived near these places have always singled out the flamingo as special. Early Christians associated it with the red phoenix. In ancient Egypt, it symbolized the sun god Ra. In Mexico and the Caribbean, it remains a major motif in art, dance, and literature. No wonder that the subtropical species stood out so loudly when Americans in temperate New England reproduced it, brightened it, and sent it wading across an inland sea of grass.

It was bound to get noticed. Flamingos and lawn art ran afoul very quickly of the arbiters of culture. Art critics launched the most direct attacks. In *Kitsch: The World of Bad Taste,* Gillo Dorfles singled out the new lawn-and-garden creatures as the "archetypal image" of bad taste. Dorfles took his cue from Clement Greenberg's 1939 diatribe against kitsch as "the debased . . . simulacra of genuine Culture." Kitsch, Greenberg had warned, "[drew] its life blood" from real Culture, and Dorfles agreed: "vampire kitsch" had evolved into "one of the crucial problems in the history of art."

American critics had been assailing the mass-produced arts for many decades. But in the 1950s, the evils were multiplying as fast as plastics, and postwar intellectuals responded aggressively. "Mass culture," Dwight Macdonald charged in 1953, "is . . . a cancerous growth on High Cul-

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ture." "The epitome of all that is spurious in the life of our times," Greenberg had warned. Dorfles agreed: it "killed all ability to distinguish between art and life."

Reality: in the 1950s, it emerged with full force in dialogues on American society. And just as taste was fortified by the idea of nature and a countermodern sensibility, Reality often expressed a set of rising worries about the modern mediation of experience and about replication. Many Americans defined whatever seemed enduring, unique, and absolute as real. *Un*-Reality, by contrast, was human artifice run amok. What more logical authority to appeal to than nature? And plastic lawn creatures—whether flamingos, madonnas, or Union Products' new lines of mice and ladybugs—emerged as the epitomization of the inauthentic.

Mass tourism came under attack, too, as the dire proliferation of ersatz experience. South Florida and Las Vegas—where working-class Americans presumed to extravagance at cheap French provincial motels with Versailles-like parterre gardens—merited special attention (from Tom Wolfe, among others) as centers for tastelessness and black holes of the ungenuine. In the geography of un-Reality, the suburbs attracted their own set of critics. In the 1956 sociological study *The Organization Man,* William Whyte characterized the suburbs as a cultureless void that negated the very individualism that so many Americans had moved there to pursue. Suburbs were mass housing for the mass consumers. As the 1963 song went, "Little boxes made of ticky-tacky . . . little boxes, all the same."

Nothing symbolized the suburbs more visibly than the regulation lawn, which also came under attack from a very different set of reality advocates. In the 1960s, the natural-lawn and organic-gardening movements rejected the lawn as an alien planting of non-native species whose survival depended on an industry led by ChemLawn and Techniturf. The eco-advocates called the lawn not just a bastion of toxicity, but also "lifeless [and] artificial." The lawn was anti-nature. In other words, natural-lawn advocates and ChemLawn clients adhered to the same countermodern definition of nature as anti-artifice. But the anti-lawn camp pitted the gaining embrace of reality against the traditional canons of taste. The eco-advocates promoted more natural planting strategies, from native grasses and a moratorium on mowing to wildflower gardens, wetlands, vegetable gardens, and burn-your-own prairies. The conflicts grew heated. "Are you or have you ever been," a prosecuting attorney in Wisconsin asked one suburbanite whose grass had exceeded the legal twelve-inch limit in the Sun Shadows West subdivision, "a member of any of those groups interested in preserving all types of plants?"

By the mid-sixties, these battalions of postwar critics had all raised direct or indirect objections to lawn flamingos. Gillo Dorfles, Tom Wolfe, and the home-prairie advocates weren't exactly bowling buddies. But by

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1970, even Sears had withdrawn the Union Products flamingos from its catalogue and replaced them with fiberglass waterfalls whose "uneven layering . . . resembles the natural, rugged beauty of authentic slate."

Artificiality, mass conformity, false experience. These were fast emerging as the targets of the 1960s counterculture as well. The baby boomers in the expanded middle class had grown up in the suburbs, and as we came of age, we famously rejected the pink washing machines and trimmed green lawns. We made "Get real" one of our most memorable slogans; we criticized a wide range of social, economic, and political policies as "unreal"; and we appealed, with the weight of historical logic behind us, to nature as the counterforce. In fact, we used the terms "reality" and "nature" almost interchangeably, and made nature less a supporting authority, and more a reigning ideal, than it had ever been. Some baby boomers joined back-to-the-land movements. Many of us went camping and backpacking. But whether or not we ever donned a five-pound pair of hiking boots and actually went *to* nature, many of us drew on Nature as a metaphor. The Revolution, as Robert Gottlieb has remarked, was definitely "an Earth Happening." *The Greening of America,* Charles Reich's best-selling generational manifesto, championed the counterculture's mission to replace "the false culture that goes with false consciousness" with a new "culture that rejects the substitution phenomenon . . . wherein artificiality replaces the natural."

Alongside the postwar critics, the baby boomers armed themselves with Reality and Nature, and converged on the ersatz. And in the fifties, sixties, and early seventies, all the hostile forces pounced on one target, above all others, with unanimous and utmost scorn: PLASTIC. Its production and use continued to soar. But plastic crashed from a metaphoric peak, as the exemplar of "Better Things for Better Living Through Chemistry," to the cancer at the core of America's soul. As Joan Didion put it, America's "most publicized self-doubts [were] Vietnam, Saran Wrap, diet pills, [and] the Bomb." Gary Snyder wrote poems against "plastic spoons, plywood veneer, PVC pipe, vinyl seat covers." A New Left manifesto excoriated the "white honkie culture . . . handed to us on a plastic platter." And in 1968, when an affluent white honkie suburbanite put his arm around Dustin Hoffman in *The Graduate* and said, "I just want to say one word to you. Just one word . . . *plastics,*" the line captured perfectly the disaffections of an entire generation of middle-class baby boomers. And what could be more plastic in 1968 than a hot pink plastic flamingo (for $3.69 a pair) that stuck out like a UFO on a lime green suburban lawn in Iowa or New Jersey?

When, exactly, did it become the very definition of anti-nature—the gewgaw to end all gewgaws, the *ne plus ultra* of lawn art? It is hard to say. But by 1972, when John Waters's movie *Pink Flamingos* opened with a shot

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of the eponymous birds outside the trailer of a three-hundred-pound woman played by the transvestite actor Divine—who vies successfully for the national title of "filthiest person alive" by eating dog feces and murdering her competitors in front of tabloid and TV reporters—it clearly had happened.

And that's when people began to laugh. Divine wears garish makeup and print housedresses. She drives a '58 Cadillac, urinates on suburban lawns, and has an incestuous relationship with her son, who himself is fond of dead chickens. Waters advertised the movie as an "exercise in poor taste" and "liked the understatement." The underground press loved *Pink Flamingos* and crowned Waters the Prince of Puke. "It's like getting a standing ovation," Waters explained, "if someone vomits watching one of my films." He enjoyed the reviews, too: *Variety* called it "one of the most vile, stupid and repulsive films ever made."

Waters had grown up in an upper-middle-class suburb. And what more enjoyable and satisfying way for the rebel baby boomers to reject their parents' values than to assault the middle-class faith in taste—and to use a blatant symbol of artifice? Still, Waters's cohort itself defined American society as plastic: his exaggeration of artifice—which converted the flamingo into a tool for rebellion and gave it a second, ironic life—presupposed the critique. In his movie *Desperate Living,* which showcased cannibalism, a sex change, and female wrestling, the heroine yells, "ALL NATURAL FORESTS SHOULD BE TURNED INTO HOUSING DEVELOPMENTS! I WANT CEMENT COVERING EVERY BLADE OF GRASS IN THE NATION!" To "understand bad taste," Waters has written, "one has to have very good taste."

Led by Andy Warhol, pop artists, too, brazenly sought out the cheap, the fake, the mass-produced, the plastic. Warhol's grids of identical Mona Lisas and Campbell's soup cans deliberately tapped the deepest fears of the standard-bearers. "I am for art you can pick your nose with," Claes Oldenburg proclaimed in his manifesto, "for the majestic art of dogturds," "for Kool-art, 7-UP art . . . Ex-lax art . . . Meat-o-rama art." Just as Waters transgressed taste, the pop artists mocked nature to transgress the established boundaries of both taste and art. And like Waters, they, too, commented on mass culture in terms that at once celebrated and critiqued it. As Oldenburg wrote, "I am for an art that embroils itself with the everyday crap & still comes out on top."

Gay men, too, adopted the plastic flamingo in the sixties. Waters planted his movies firmly in the camp sensibility, in which transvestism and drag queens have long played an especially conspicuous part. Gay men waged arguably the most creative celebration of the extremes of artifice—and the most transgressive, since for what mainstream social standard have Americans appealed to the absolute authority of nature

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more vehemently than for heterosexuality? Versailles emerged as a camp Eden. Drag queens donned pink and plastic. And the pink flamingo settled in to enjoy a secure berth in the symbolic arsenal of the gay and camp subcultures.

In the early 1970s, Union Products issued a pig in a three-piece suit. It marketed a "flamingo deluxe," too—with more natural, yellow legs—but it didn't sell. Who would prefer it? Not the working-class fans, or the tasteful middle-class homeowners, or (especially) the baby boomer fans. By the late seventies, pink flamingos began to disappear into the hands of thieves under cover of night. Having become an established symbol of the insurrectionary—as a marker of the transgression of the unmovable boundary of nature—the bird became a useful thing to have around more generally to mark anything rebellious, outrageous, or oxymoronic. It became an effective way to post a sign: "Something subversive happening here." What did pink flamingos have to do with real flamingos? Not much. But in the 1970s, we began to use them as a ubiquitous signpost for crossing the various, overlapping boundaries of class, taste, propriety, art, sexuality, and nature.

And then the uses and meanings of the pink flamingo became really complex. In 1984, *Miami Vice* splashed a glitzy vision of south Florida across American TV screens. Plastic flamingo sales boomed. In 1986, for the first time, Union Products sold more flamingos than Charlie the Ducks. Soon you could order them through a *Rolling Stone* ad, or from the flamingo specialty store Cat's Pyjamas, where a box of two birds cost $9.95, two dollars more than the same pair at Kmart.

The 1980s had arrived. As the sixties rebels moved into the economic mainstream, the new thirty-something yuppies still liked to think of themselves as social critics and cultural rebels. The early-sixties Port Huron manifesto for the New Left had begun, "We are people of this generation, bred in at least modest comfort . . . looking uncomfortably to the world we inherit." In the Reagan eighties, we began uncomfortably to inherit the world in immodest comfort. The crossing of boundaries remained a badge of identity, but it was now safer, and very often a matter of style. The flamingos at poolsides and on condo porches were like blue jeans in boardrooms and Jeeps in Upper West Side garages—or the Don Johnson combination, in *Miami Vice,* of a white Armani suit with a two-day beard and no socks. As the Cat's Pyjamas catalogue advertised, just above a listing for a pink-flamingo vinyl doormat: "On every page, you'll find just what you need to ruin your neighborhood."

In the 1980s, Americans traveled with the birds across the borders of states and nations. We gave flamingos as birthday, housewarming, and moving presents. They showed up as wedding decorations, and we substituted them for reindeer in Christmas lawn tableaux. In sum, once the

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flamingo became a baby boomer signpost for boundary violations in the eighties—after having evolved, in the fifties, sixties, and early seventies, into the metonymy of artifice and anti-nature—we logically began to use it, in an unorchestrated rash of gestures coast to coast, as a marker for crossing into new places, times, eras, stages of life, and even the most sacrosanct reaches of nature itself. At the same time, the truly transgressive crossings had become less dangerous. Thieves, for example, still snatched the birds at night—but the owners now met ransom demands with play money and pink champagne. In the early seventies, by contrast, such thefts had shared the same reception, and the same nocturnal defiance, as the leftist missions to repaint black lawn jockeys with African liberation colors.

The boundaries of art, too, had become safer to cross. In the 1980s, art galleries featured kitsch exhibits. In 1983, Christo wrapped eleven islands off the coast of Miami with bands of hot pink polypropylene plastic. The project was at once a self-conscious transgression from high art to mass culture—which, like Warhol's soup cans, maintained the boundaries by commenting on them—and a convincing proof of the erosion of these same borders. Inevitably, it also made a statement about nature and artifice in modern American society. The pink flamingo, of course, made exactly the same statement for less than ten dollars and without a fleet of boats. In 1987, the governor of Massachusetts issued a proclamation that the pink flamingo was an essential contribution to American folk art.

Still, the pink flamingo had graduated to Art not so much because of its aesthetic merits but because of the baby boomers' ascendance. In the eighties, artifice consolidated its firm place in the adult boomers' identity by at least two routes. First, the thirty-somethings began to wax nostalgic about the 1950s. The pink flamingo effectively called up a collective childhood past—the innocence, optimism, and exuberant fakeness of the era of passion pink kitchens. Flamingos manufactured in the fifties began to appear with Art Deco bric-a-brac in antique stores—even though these fifty-dollar birds had been manufactured from essentially the same mold as the ones at Kmart. But the fifties children had been sixties rebels, too. We'd embraced the extremes of artifice to rebel against taste, but also to show that the un-Reality of American society could be fun to play in. In the 1980s, many middle-class baby boomers would exude a cool, ironic, half-affectionate, half-mocking stance toward TV, lawn ornaments, and the rest of what Dwight Macdonald had once labeled the "spreading ooze." Some of us worried and wrung our hands about mass culture. Some of us enjoyed it. Many of us did both.

Ironically, or conveniently, as we fortified a vision of nature as a Place Apart that erases people's economic *uses* of nature, we were consolidating our own affluence. And the retail landscape was changing fast to tap into

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yuppie desires. Forever Flamingo, Do Wah Diddy, and Sarsaparilla Deco Designs catered to the nostalgic embrace of the fifties. A second set of companies, which included Cat's Pyjamas, Poor Taste, and Archie McPhee's Toy Store and Espresso Tiki Hut, marketed Waters-style irony. All these stores prominently featured pink flamingos. On the other side of the divide, The Nature Company, Natural Wonders, and The Natural Selection were strict anti-artifice zones. The St. Louis Zoo gift shop did sell a polyester flamingo named Laverne and a music box, with two revolving flamingos, that played "The Way We Were." But here, as at other nature stores, the standard plastic flamingo was *avis non grata.*

By the late 1980s, the flamingo had acquired a great measure of legitimacy. Other lawn ornaments came and went—Granny Fannies and fuzzy lawn sheep in 1987–88, a lawn-mice revival in 1989–90. In 1987, flamingo fans nationally—a few in new clubs such as the International Society for the Preservation of Pink Lawn Flamingos—celebrated the bird's thirtieth birthday. In reaction, John Waters gave away every flamingo he owned. At Union Products, Don Featherstone was promoted to vice president. He signed with an agent and moved into a large home in Fitchburg with his wife, their poodle Bourgeois, and a large flamingo collection. And in 1987, Featherstone made the first major alteration to his original mold: he inscribed his autograph on the bird's flank, to distinguish his design from copies marketed by two other companies. "We're trying," he explained, "to protect its image as the original." From that point on, Kmart shoppers could check to be sure that they were purchasing the real and legitimate symbol of inauthenticity and artificiality.

And so the fifties children entered the 1990s—a decade in which we've been obsessed with boundaries, and in which the Internet challenges even the borders of time and space. The culture wars raged fiercely in the universities, where baby boomers elevated African folk tales, yard art, and Pearl Jam to the same level of cultural legitimacy as Shakespeare, Rodin, and Beethoven. As multiculturalism became a watchword, affluent white Americans rifled cultural traditions worldwide, in a sort of global rummage sale, for food, clothes, music, and religion. Sexual borders became roiled in their own set of battles in the arts, the courts, the universities, and the military. In 1997, the comedian Ellen DeGeneres's coming out drew as much media scrutiny as a small war.

It's not surprising that pink flamingos flew off the shelves in the 1990s, even as concrete "fashion geese" reigned as the new rage in ornaments that people actually put on their lawns. We continued to travel with flamingos—you don't do that with Charlie the Duck or a concrete goose wearing a dress—and a pair showed up at Cape Canaveral before a rocket launch. We use the birds, in old ways and new, to mark the whizzing traffic across borders—intact, blurred, safe, dangerous, social, cultural,

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national, aesthetic, spatial, temporal, sexual, planetary. Campers post flamingos outside their tents at national forest campsites. You can now hire the company Flamingo Surprise to plant forty-odd flamingos on a friend's lawn the night before his birthday. A flurry of crime novels—*Flamingo, Neon Flamingo, A Morning for Flamingos*—send outsider heroes into a seedy Southern underworld. And my own fast-growing collection of flamingos? It didn't happen entirely on purpose, most of it having been bestowed on me by friends and relatives, with the exception of a special pair autographed for me by Don Featherstone. Still, I'm a baby boomer, raised in an affluent suburb, and at once a onetime scholar and a "nature person." So perhaps the birds mark my forays into a topic that doesn't seem, on the surface, to be either scholarly or natural—tame border traffic, really, compared with the "pink flamingo relay" at the 1994 Gay Games in New York that featured a combination swim race and costume pageant.

In the nineties, the affluent baby boomers entered their forties and fifties to achieve new heights of status and power; the flamingo swept into its middle-aged years of glory and reward. The *Annals of Improbable Research* awarded Don Featherstone the 1996 Ig Nobel Prize in Art. In 1997, a new Internet site on pink flamingos named On Stagnant Pond—a counter-Walden of anti-Nature—swiftly garnered a raft of awards. In the art scene, lawn ornaments moved from art galleries into museums. The Philbrook Museum of Art in Tulsa, housed in an Italianate Renaissance-style villa, posted a plastic flamingo in a pot outside a 1996 exhibit on Marilyn Monroe and Elvis. As baby boomer nostalgia has turned hagiographic—the last five years have seen Pez conventions, hundredth-anniversary celebrations of Jell-O, and a new National Plastics Center and Museum in Leominster—the pink flamingo has reigned inevitably as patron saint. It's a featured entry in the 1990 *Encyclopedia of Bad Taste* and the 1991 *Whole Pop Catalog*.

In 1996, Don Featherstone bought and became president of Union Products. In 1997, the bird's fortieth birthday engendered national hoopla as Featherstone traveled to flamingo signings around the country. The birthday coincided with the twenty-fifth anniversary of *Pink Flamingos,* and Fine Line rereleased the movie nationally, with extra footage that included Waters's justification for killing a chicken: "Well, I eat chicken and I know the chicken didn't land on my plate from a heart attack. I think we made the chicken's life better. It got to be in a movie." *People* interviewed Waters's steadfast parents: "We're very proud of John, but we just don't see any point in subjecting ourselves to that film." Some reviewers, however, lost sight of the movie's rebellious and emetic role in the annals of postwar culture. "With all the plastic product around," the *Entertainment Weekly* reviewer wrote, "[this film is] a *nutritiously* entertaining event."

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In 1995, faced with a dorm-room shortage, Princeton University rented trailers to house the extra students, who promptly planted pink flamingos outside. The boundaries of class and culture, which these birds crossed but also marked, haven't exactly crumbled into dust. In the nineties, my generation of midlife homeowners has spurred a renaissance in upscale garden ornaments, including eighteenth-century English antiques. The catalogues for Earthmade and other high-end garden-supply outlets feature $299 rustic copper herons, $179 Classic Fiberglass urns, even $24.95 stone sharks ("Eats pink flamingos for breakfast!"). Yet the dialogues of aesthetics have come a very long way since Capability Brown and Andrew Jackson Downing. These borders—and so many others—are recognizable. But aren't they under intense negotiation?

All except one lone boundary: *Nature and Artifice.* In three decades, the baby boomers have broken down borders of every kind. But as we've done so, we've consistently made the wall between nature and not-nature more visible and powerful, and we've left it standing. And this is the last secret, so far, of the pink flamingo. In an age of ever more fluid and negotiable boundaries, an effective boundary marker itself has to mark a boundary that is defined as rigid and absolute. The pink flamingo still works so beautifully because it stakes the ur-boundary that we have used to mark and challenge all others. The countermodern definition of nature as anti-artifice has remained remarkably unchallenged. We've asked, What is art—and can it be a pink flamingo? What is good taste—and should we care? What is good literature or good music or good film? What is normal sexuality? *But has anyone ever asked whether a pink flamingo is nature?* If a few of us have called the plastic creature art, who has called it nature? And for all who have questioned the *nature* of art or taste or sexuality or moral right and wrong or even reality, how many of us have asked what *nature* is? The pink flamingo has told us very little about real flamingos or about the nonhuman natural world. And yet, within each plastic flamingo lies an unquestioned *definition* of nature—as anti-artifice, not-human, and countermodern.

When I visited the Union Products factory in Leominster, I watched two men use a large vacuum tube to suck the polyethylene crystals, flecked with pink dye, from outsize cardboard Mobil and Phillips 66 boxes and expel the mixture into aluminum molds. Other workers painted the bills yellow and black, using petroleum-based paints. They cut lengths of rolled steel, made from iron and other ores, for the legs. Very literally, the plastic pink flamingo is wholly real, and certifiably natural. It's just nature that's been mined, harvested, sold, heated, boxed, resold, and reshipped. It is nature mixed with human artifice—just like Andrew Jackson Downing's lawn, mowed in the moonlight by "invisible hands." The definition of nature as anti-artifice has always erased the human presence in our bastions of Nature, and the definition of artifice

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as anti-nature has erased the nature used to manufacture it. My generation and class have wielded a vision of naturalness that sidesteps our own complicity in the aggressive and unsustainable uses of natural resources. And we've made it ever more entrenched as our economic power has grown. Would you believe that the history of the pink flamingo has a moral? The symbol of artifice is actually nature incarnate.

What *can* a pink flamingo mean? The garden writer Allen Lacy has written that "every garden tempts us to live within [the] illusion . . . that it is something natural, not the creation of artifice." "The plastic flamingo," he observes, "remind[s] us what gardens are: not the gifts of nature to deserving human beings but the products of human beings cooperating with the natural order to create utility and delight." Signposts everywhere, in the venues of nature and culture: flamingos on lawns, in movie theaters, on ski slopes, in the hands of thieves, in art galleries, and on the snowed-in shores of Hudson Bay. We've read the signs, uprooted them, and reinvented them. Yet the pink flamingos seem to me much like the Jell-O at the hundredth-anniversary Jell-O parties. The more variations we come up with, the more the plastic birds insist on their essential nature.

As for Don Featherstone, he's pondered the history and stardom of his creation with some wistfulness. "I really like how my flamingo looks," he says. "But I can't help but wonder, why not my duck?"

His duck, he adds, is more realistic.

And in that last observation, I suspect, lies the answer.

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Jane Austen Changes Her Mind

CHRISTOPHER CLAUSEN

It is a truth universally acknowledged, that in the last few years Jane Austen has become nearly everyone's favorite pre-twentieth-century novelist. How much Hollywood and the BBC should be credited for this turn of events is hard to say—cause or effect?—but recent films and televersions have appeared of all her novels except *Mansfield Park,* including at least two *Emma*s and multiple *Pride and Prejudice*s. Undoubtedly, one reason for her present popularity is what has been called the *Masterpiece Theatre* syndrome: nostalgia for a lush, libidinous rural England in which everybody knows his or her place and a proposal from the right man solves all problems. Film versions, where elegantly costumed beaux and deep-bosomed belles intrigue in an environment of lovingly photographed stately homes, usually cater to this stereotype of the author and her times.

As long ago as 1940, D. W. Harding's article "Regulated Hatred" tried to correct the widespread image of an author whose tasteful good humor was exceeded only by her charity for human foibles. Every serious critic of Jane Austen now points to large elements of irony, social criticism, and even malice in her works. Some, like Alison Sulloway in *Jane Austen and the Province of Womanhood,* see her as an angry feminist whose satirical "purposes were as insurrectionary as those of Mary Wollstonecraft and Wollstonecraft's feminist colleagues of the 1790s and later." Marilyn Butler's influential *Jane Austen and the War of Ideas,* on the other hand,

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describes the author as a systematic conservative in the political context of her time, an anti-feminist, a writer whose main theme was the damage that romantic individualism could inflict on a social hierarchy with a summit rightfully occupied by the landowning gentry. The dearth of critical agreement about such basic matters encourages ordinary readers and viewers to find their own views of life and society reflected in these subtle works—undoubtedly another source of their popularity.

Whether critics read them as conservative, as occupying "a progressive middle ground" (Claudia Johnson), or as explicitly feminist, most have tended to see the six completed Austen novels as ideologically all of a piece, apart from differences of emphasis from book to book. Whatever social views they convey are usually assumed to have changed little during what was after all a short writing career (though questions are often raised as to where the fragmentary *Sanditon*, in which entrepreneurship figures prominently, might have gone if its author had not died of Addison's disease in the summer of 1817).

This durable if sometimes qualified consensus about the completed novels is remarkable, given what happens in *Persuasion*, the last of them, written when the author was already ill. A junior naval officer, Frederick Wentworth, meets the motherless daughter of a baronet, Anne Elliot, whose family has exaggerated social pretensions. Rejected on the advice of the heroine's godmother, Lady Russell, who has a horror "of any thing approaching to imprudence," Wentworth vows to make his fortune in war. Returning rich eight years later when the Elliots' own fortunes have declined—they have had to rent out the family estate—he reclaims Anne after a series of nervous misunderstandings that seem more characteristic of a Victorian novel. Except for the much earlier *Northanger Abbey*, which appeared in the same posthumous four volumes, *Persuasion* is the shortest of Jane Austen's finished works; it offers hardly anything in the way of subplots to confuse the picture. The only novel whose action is precisely dated, it puts at its center the navy officers who have come home mantled in the prestige of victory after Napoleon's exile to Elba in 1814.

Persuasion is Jane Austen's "problem novel" in two senses. In contrast to its predecessors, its whole significance is organized around an explicit problem to which Anne and Wentworth return again and again: was she right or wrong in yielding to Lady Russell's persuasion? At the same time, the novel itself constitutes a problem for critics. How does it fit into the pattern of its author's career as a whole? Is the book important enough, or even good enough, for the question to matter much? Until the 1980s most commentators saw *Persuasion* as a relatively minor work and emphasized what they considered its faults of construction. The rise of more content-oriented kinds of criticism raised its reputation dramati-

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cally; Robert Hopkins speaks for many recent readers in declaring that "it has become my favorite Jane Austen novel."

Nonetheless, while noticing its stronger emphasis on individual choice and its more mature characters, most critics continue to assimilate Jane Austen's last novel to her previous five. Marilyn Butler sees "a classic case-study of a modern-minded man from the conservative point of view. . . . With Captain Wentworth thus established as its well-intentioned but ideologically mistaken hero, the novel takes a course familiar to the reader of Jane Austen's other novels." In a similar vein, Claudia Johnson wrote in 1988:

> Most readers note . . . that *Persuasion* ridicules the ruling class. This fact appears distinctive, however, only when we assume that it is a departure from the practice of the earlier novels. . . . As one historian has observed, foolish and financially embarrassed landowners are nothing new to English social history or to Austen's fiction. Eventually, Sir Walter will reassume Kellynch, and yield it in the time-honored way to his heir William Elliot. . . .
>
> But if in *Persuasion* the landed classes have not lost their power, they have lost their prestige and their moral authority for the heroine.

This conclusion seems a serious underestimate of the actual state of affairs set forth by the end of the novel. Even on the level of plot, one may well doubt that Sir Walter Elliot will ever return to Kellynch; and his heir plans to auction the place off the minute he inherits it. If one begins by recalling that almost every Austen novel reacts against some major feature of the one before, a different picture starts to emerge. In many respects *Persuasion* represents an unprecedented shift of direction from all the previous novels, especially its two immediate predecessors, *Mansfield Park* and *Emma,* in which country-house society seemed to reach an apotheosis. To use a fashionable word, *Persuasion* "subverts," not the fundamental moral values its author had always espoused, but nearly all the social attitudes and institutions whose primacy had been an unquestioned fact from her first-published *Sense and Sensibility* through *Emma:* the landed gentry, family continuity, a whole order that values manners and tradition over achievement. Her support for the landowning class was never unqualified; the squire had to live up to his position. But in the novels before *Persuasion,* there was always at least one landowner near the center of the action who did so well enough to exemplify the ideal, if not fully embody it. Here both the upper and the lower gentry, the Elliots and their good-natured but ineffectual relations by marriage the Musgroves, are hopelessly unequal to their responsibilities.

In *Mansfield Park,* an earlier baronet presided more or less admirably over an estate that, though threatened and flawed, represented some-

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thing of a social ideal. But Sir Walter Elliot of Kellynch Hall is portrayed as a fool and a narcissist from the first page to the last. His extravagant snobbery forces him to rent his estate to Wentworth's brother-in-law, a landless admiral, and move to Bath, with Anne regretfully concluding "that they were gone who deserved not to stay, and that Kellynch-hall had passed into better hands than its owners'." Enter the self-made man. In Dickens, Trollope, and other Victorian novelists, such men often look uncultivated and threatening in comparison with the declining gentry. Not here. Whatever ambivalences may find their way into Jane Austen's portrayal of Anne Elliot's meekness, the exchange of Admiral Croft for Sir Walter Elliot is unambiguously a change for the better.

That the happiness of individuals is the most important underlying value in Jane Austen's fiction hardly needs demonstration; the word and its variants appear in favorable contexts dozens or hundreds of times in every Austen novel. In this respect, as in so many others, the author was an orthodox child of the eighteenth century. The forms in which she permits her approved-of characters to seek happiness, however, are severely limited, and not only by the equally eighteenth-century emphasis on kindness and beneficence toward other individuals. Marriage for love; "rational pleasures" (the phrase is from *Emma*) within a deeply localized social order that is often critiqued but never rejected; books; a modest or, better, lavish competence that comes without being energetically sought—these patterns define the limits of felicity, for men and women alike, in all the novels published during her lifetime.

Elinor Dashwood (*Sense and Sensibility*) marries a spectacularly unambitious man after his gold-digging fiancée has run away and a church living has been bestowed on him as if from heaven. Elizabeth Bennet (*Pride and Prejudice*), the most forward Austen heroine, marries inherited wealth after a series of providential if sometimes comical coincidences. Fanny Price (*Mansfield Park*), the least forward, rejects a wealthy, highly recommended, but (it turns out) morally worthless outsider and ends up marrying the cousin she has loved all her short life. Emma Woodhouse (*Emma*), the richest but most provincial heroine, finally decides to marry the dull, much older boy next door, though part of the ironic price this most conscientious of landowners pays is the (temporary?) abandonment of his own estate so that they can continue to pamper her impossible father by moving in with him.

As has often been pointed out, no Jane Austen heroine has a career remotely comparable to Jane Austen's. Apart from marriage, no Jane Austen heroine has a career at all, or ever wants to. It is less often noticed that the same is largely true of the men. Until *Persuasion*, no hero chooses his vocation in life voluntarily or practices it ambitiously. Four of the earlier five are either eldest sons who dutifully manage the estates they inherited from their fathers or younger sons whose fathers have thrust

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them into the church; the fifth is an eldest son with no estate who likewise follows the line of least resistance into the church. Not one ever considers leaving the station into which he was born.

Frederick Wentworth is the only Jane Austen hero who lifts a finger to better his position in life, as well as the only one of whose parents we hear no more than that they are dead. Apart from Sir Walter's early description of Wentworth's brother as "nobody . . . quite unconnected," we never learn anything about the hero's social or even geographic origins. Anne Elliot is the only Jane Austen heroine who marries without knowing where she and her husband will live. Their marriage is the only one that may plausibly produce no children—not just because of the couple's relatively advanced age (he thirty-one, she twenty-seven), but because there is no estate to inherit or other social function for children to fulfill. Besides, the author has already struck a telling blow against family values by presenting Anne's Musgrove nephews as insufferable pests and displaying the most appealing long-married couple in all her novels, the Crofts, as blissfully childless. (Anne's mentor, the widowed Lady Russell, is also childless.) Unlike landed estates, the Royal Navy requires no dynastic continuity.

The navy made a brief appearance in *Mansfield Park* in the attractive person of Fanny's brother William, a midshipman. The plot of that novel made the navy subordinate to the established gentry because William depended on the "interest" of Henry Crawford and his uncle, a retired admiral, for promotion. In *Persuasion* the order of dependence is reversed, for the officers we see, on inactive duty following the long war with France, are starting to infuse their energy and wealth into the country-house world itself. Although the contrast between indolence on one side and initiative on the other is hard to overlook, few critics have noticed how strikingly aggressive Captain Wentworth is. The first we hear of him is as "a young man, who had nothing but himself to recommend him, and no hopes of attaining affluence, but in the chances of a most uncertain profession, and no connexions to secure even his farther rise in that profession." Patriotism was by no means the only motive for a naval career. Successful commanders made fortunes from the sale of enemy ships and cargoes taken in action, the proceeds of which—"prize money"— were divided up among officers and crews according to seniority. Wentworth had saved none of his prize money so far, but was "confident that he should soon be rich—full of life and ardour, he knew that he should soon have a ship, and soon be on a station that would lead to every thing he wanted. He had always been lucky; he knew he should be so still."

This description, mediated through the consciousness of the cautious Lady Russell, has something in common with earlier figures in Austen novels—notably Willoughby, in *Sense and Sensibility*, and Wickham, in *Pride*

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and Prejudice. These other outsiders of whom nothing was known turned out to be predatory seducers, a fact that gives some plausibility to Lady Russell's "persuasion" of Anne to break her engagement. A slightly earlier Jane Austen would have offered the same advice, especially when the man's surname again began with a *W.* The timeless sexual reputation of sailors is also hinted at by Mrs. Clay, a hanger-on of the Elliots and (apparently) sometime prostitute who praises the "liberality" of seafaring men. Even apart from such explicit warnings, Wentworth's "sanguine temper, and fearlessness of mind," which Lady Russell regards as danger signs, have rarely turned out to be positive qualities in Jane Austen's earlier men.

In the account of his career that he gives to the Musgroves, Wentworth speaks of his first command, an ancient, unseaworthy sloop called the *Asp,* in which he was ordered to the West Indies:

> Ah! she was a dear old *Asp* to me. She did all that I wanted. I knew she would.—I knew that we should either go to the bottom together, or that she would be the making of me; and I never had two days of foul weather all the time I was at sea in her; and after taking privateers enough to be very entertaining, I had the good luck, in my passage home the next autumn, to fall in with the very French frigate I wanted.—I brought her into Plymouth.

A frigate is a larger, more heavily armed vessel than even the healthiest sloop. As a result of this legendary exploit, Wentworth is promoted from commander to post captain. (Not coincidentally, Commander Jack Aubrey achieves a similar early victory in Patrick O'Brian's *Master and Commander.* In a less subtle tribute, the protagonist of O'Brian's first historical novel of the sea, *The Golden Ocean*, apparently becomes engaged to a Miss Anne Elliot.) Wentworth's new frigate, the *Laconia,* takes more prizes: "How fast I made money in her," he exults. "A friend of mine, and I, had such a lovely cruise together off the Western Islands."

Informed and inspired by her two naval brothers, the author clearly approves of this semi-piratical way of life, together with the relative social egalitarianism it entails. Sir Walter, whose compass always points in the wrong direction, predictably frowns on the navy "as being the means of bringing persons of obscure birth into undue distinction, and raising men to honours which their fathers and grandfathers never dreamt of." The obvious Marxist conclusion that Jane Austen suddenly abandoned feudal in favor of bourgeois values is too crude and sweeping. For her the navy represents a set of qualities and attitudes, not a class; nor, despite the pursuit of prize money, can it be equated with a commercial enterprise. But we are a long, long way here from the world of Mr. Darcy and Mr. Knightley.

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Although Jane Austen undoubtedly knew that the navy contained its share of rogues, tyrants, and fools, we see none of them here, except perhaps the inconstant Captain Benwick. So wholeheartedly does *Persuasion* embrace the navy that contrary to what one would expect, sailors' lives are presented as more welcoming to women than either of the realms (the great house, the parsonage) into which previous heroines married. The naval officers we meet in *Persuasion* are more inclined than the idle men of earlier Austen novels to treat women as friends and equals. Maybe it has something to do with spending so much of their professional lives surrounded by other men.

Early in the book Wentworth announces recklessly that "I hate to hear of women on board, or to see them on board; and no ship, under my command, shall ever convey a family of ladies any where, if I can help it"—because, he adds tactfully, a warship can never be made as comfortable as a woman deserves. But his sister and brother-in-law immediately attack him for these sentiments. "I hate to hear you talking so," says the fearless Mrs. Croft, "like a fine gentleman, and as if women were all fine ladies, instead of rational creatures. We none of us expect to be in smooth water all our days." Admiral Croft ends the debate with the annihilating observation: "Ah! my dear, when he has got a wife, he will sing a different tune. When he is married, if we have the good luck to live to another war, we shall see him do as you and I, and a great many others, have done. We shall have him very thankful to anybody that will bring him his wife."

Navy wives seem to be in on more of life than gentry women, as well as more confident. Mrs. Croft's "manners were open, easy, and decided, like one who had no distrust of herself, and no doubts of what to do; without any approach to coarseness, however, or any want of good humour." It soon transpires that she has spent most of her fifteen-year marriage at sea with her husband. After marrying on a few days' acquaintance, they began an existence that has no precedent in the five earlier novels and that the author has her describe at length. As she explains to Mrs. Musgrove:

> I have crossed the Atlantic four times, and have been once to the East Indies, and back again; and only once, besides being in different places about home—Cork, and Lisbon, and Gibraltar. . . . And I do assure you, ma'am, that nothing can exceed the accommodations of a man of war; I speak, you know, of the higher rates. When you come to a frigate, of course, you are more confined—though any reasonable woman may be perfectly happy in one of them; and I can safely say, that the happiest part of my life has been spent on board a ship. While we were together, you know, there was nothing to be feared. . . . The only time that I ever really suffered in body or mind, the only time that I ever fancied myself unwell, or had any ideas of danger, was the

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> winter that I passed by myself at Deal, when the Admiral (*Captain* Croft then) was in the North Seas. I lived in perpetual fright at that time, and had all manner of imaginary complaints from not knowing what to do with myself, or when I should hear from him next; but as long as we could be together, nothing ever ailed me, and I never met with the smallest inconvenience.

Although she modestly declares that "many women have done more," no Jane Austen character ever lived or talked this way before. Emma Woodhouse, we may remember, has never traveled as far as Box Hill. On land Mrs. Croft makes most of her husband's decisions for him, but the overall effect is of an immensely attractive equality and camaraderie. Such a woman and such a marriage take us into a realm where men and women of "sanguine temper, and fearlessness of mind" are perfectly capable of actions that change their lives for the better. Like brother, like sister. She is Lady Russell's opposite, and a much better model for Anne.

This favorable portrayal of man-woman relations among naval officers—explicitly contrasted with the state of affairs in gentry society—is not confined to one couple. When Anne and the younger Musgroves visit the Harvilles and Captain Benwick in Lyme, their fellowship and hospitality overwhelm her after the coldness of her own world. Lyme with its sailors functions in the book as a symbolically warm and attractive place, in contrast to haughty Bath with its gentry. "'These would have been all my friends,' was her thought; and she had to struggle against a great tendency to lowness." Near the end of the book, Anne and Captain Harville conduct a friendly, candid debate about the relative fidelity of the two sexes that is the most sustained discussion of relations between women and men in all of Jane Austen's novels. A narrative corollary to this drastic reduction in distance is a passage early in the book in which the author violates her usual practice of directly probing only women's consciousness by first describing Wentworth's state of mind directly, and then having him reveal more of it in intimate conversation with his sister and brother-in-law. (Not surprisingly, the subject is marriage.) Despite the brevity of the novel, innovations like these make Wentworth Jane Austen's most deeply characterized hero.

These early scenes confirm for the reader what Anne already believes at the beginning of the book: that her rejection of Wentworth eight years earlier at Lady Russell's behest was a disastrous mistake, a failure of nerve barely justified by the deference a nineteen-year-old owes to the one mature woman who cares about her. Advice giving on matters of love and marriage, it is relevant to point out, was not entirely unfamiliar to Jane Austen in her other career as an aunt. In the autumn of 1814 her

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motherless niece Fanny Knight, then twenty-one, fell in and rapidly out of love, a crisis about which the two women corresponded at length. Jane Austen's advice, though highly ambivalent, sounds today a great deal more perceptive than Lady Russell's. The essence of it is: he would be a great match, but if you really can't love him, give it up. She also insists that "indeed you must not let anything depend on my opinion." Fanny's dilemma was the exact opposite of the as-yet-uncreated Anne Elliot's: whether to break off an engagement to a thoroughly eligible young man whom she discovered she did not wish to marry. Six years later, after her aunt's death, she married a baronet—an example worth cherishing of the tangled relations between life and art.

In the penultimate chapter of *Persuasion*, Anne and Wentworth discuss the "persuasion" that cost them eight years of suffering. Anne declares:

> I must believe that I was right, much as I suffered from it, that I was perfectly right in being guided by the friend whom you will love better than you do now. To me, she was in the place of a parent. Do not mistake me, however. I am not saying that she did not err in her advice. It was, perhaps, one of those cases in which advice is good or bad only as the event decides; and for myself, I certainly never should, in any circumstance of tolerable similarity, give such advice. But I mean, that I was right in submitting to her, and that if I had done otherwise, I should have suffered more in continuing the engagement than I did even in giving it up, because I should have suffered in my conscience.

This conclusion is often taken as that of the author, and so it may be. But notice exactly what is being said, and again, the degree of ambivalence it betrays in both author and character. First, the advice was wrong, and not merely in retrospect; Anne would never put a young person in such a position herself. Even before meeting Wentworth again, she vows early in the book to take "the side of early warm attachment, and a cheerful confidence in futurity, against that over-anxious caution which seems to insult exertion and distrust Providence!"

Second, deference to a surrogate parent was the only possible excuse for her action; Anne makes no effort at all to justify the grounds of her godmother's counsel. Those values of gentry society on which the advice was based now seem so indefensible that neither Anne nor the author even mentions them here. The plot is so arranged that virtually everything in the book argues against Anne's acceptance of it: her own bitter regret; the happiness of the Crofts, who married on such brief acquaintance ("if Miss Elliot were to hear how soon we came to an understanding," says Mrs. Croft, "she would never be persuaded [*sic*] that we could be happy together"); the death of Captain Harville's sister before her

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prudently delayed marriage to Captain Benwick could take place; the fading of her own family's pretensions and rise of the Wentworths; above all, eight lost years. To be sure, Wentworth eventually discovers that had he renewed his addresses two years afterward with his promotion and "a few thousand pounds" in hand, he would have been accepted, but he could hardly have suspected that at the time. As an attempt to exculpate Lady Russell, this late revelation is not very convincing. One can speculate that the author might have altered the passage for the better, along with a few other weak spots, had she been well enough to give the manuscript her usual degree of revision.

Furthermore, by the time of this conversation the reader has seen Lady Russell blunder disastrously again in trying to persuade Anne to marry her wealthy cousin, William Elliot, the heir to the Kellynch estate. The same mixture of exaggerated prudence and "prejudices on the side of ancestry" blinds her on both occasions. We have seen these prejudices wielded in earlier novels by such heavies as General Tilney in *Northanger Abbey* and Lady Catherine de Bourgh in *Pride and Prejudice,* but never before did they cause so much unhappiness. No wonder Jane Austen feels compelled to remind us so often that Lady Russell "was a very good woman." Mr. Elliot turns out to be a scheming hypocrite and ends by setting up Mrs. Clay as his mistress. In a schematically complete inversion of what happens in *Mansfield Park,* the unknown outsider turns out to be the hero and proper mate for the heroine, while the seducer figure and chief threat to the book's values is not merely a man long (though obviously not well) known, but the member of the heroine's own family who will inherit the house and title. It would be hard to identify a more striking change of mind in a major novelist about where the most important dangers lay to her characters, class, and moral convictions.

So what happened? No ideological formulation is subtle enough to capture Jane Austen's purposes in any of her novels, but the question still needs to be asked. She had published four books that defended, with varying degrees of qualification, the outlook and privileges of the landed gentry. After creating the claustrophobic village world of *Emma,* did she wake up one morning and say to herself, *There must be some alternative to these stupid, complacent people?* Did her cautious, communal outlook alter somewhat in favor of boldness and risk taking, a willingness to see happiness pursued in hitherto unacceptable ways—to recognize love and merit without scrutinizing their pedigrees quite so insistently—when she began to suspect she was dying? Her letters and other surviving evidence give us no real clue. Her only description of *Persuasion,* in two letters to her niece Fanny, is as "a something ready for publication" with a heroine who "is almost too good for me."

Whatever the causes, after a career spent enforcing prudence on her

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own fictional goddaughters, Jane Austen seems in her last completed work to have found herself in Lady Russell's position, with no alternative left but "to admit that she had been pretty completely wrong, and to take up a new set of opinions and of hopes." For the well-meaning but limited Lady Russell, these fresh hopes and opinions seem to stretch no further than the immediate objects of her concern, Anne and the man she finally marries. For the author and her readers, a wider world is suddenly visible on the horizon. Even though the discontinuities of life and authorship are far from absolute, the "new set of opinions" dramatized in *Persuasion* adds to our many reasons for regretting that Jane Austen died at the age of forty-one. There is simply no telling what kinds of novels she might have gone on to write.

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My Aunt Faith

RODNEY GOVE DENNIS

A mechanical hospital bed has a little woman on it.
She is 104, apparently, at long last, getting ready.
The mechanical bed hums and unfolds,
and it seems to blossom with blankets and mattresses,
and the last mattress is a field she told me about three weeks ago.
That field was a hundred years ago on Shelter Island
where unexpectedly she was accompanied by her father on a summer walk.
The meadow was to the right, the forest and a forest path
were to the left, and the two of them stood still because one
of those woody birds was singing.
They listened—there was a silence in heaven—for about five minutes,
and these minutes comprised the little girl's essential happiness,
never to be equalled. She told me this.
I can insert my own program into this story:
the fragrances, her dress, perhaps white-aproned,
between the dark woods and the light field.
Or I could populate her heaven with elements that are ambiguous
or unreliable; with terror.
She also told me what kind of bird it was, but I've forgotten.
She'd remembered it for about a hundred years.

Rodney Gove Dennis, the former Curator of Manuscripts at Harvard's Houghton Library, is the author of the chapbook *Carolyn*.

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Half-Answered Prayers

ANDREW HUDGINS

When I was a child, I longed to hear the voice of God. I prayed and prayed, begging to be heard, begging to be answered. I prayed not to die. I prayed that I wouldn't be whipped for kicking my brother. And I prayed to get things I wanted. A dog. A Cub Scout uniform. A baseball glove. A radio.

In bed at night, I spent uncountable hours in an almost mindless orgy of greed, pleading and whining for a transistor radio. Every night for months, I troubled "deaf heaven with my bootless cries," as Shakespeare phrases it. I wanted the radio so I could huddle beneath the covers after I was sent to bed, and listen to baseball games and country music. Even then, years before I could envision terminal cancer patients praying frantically for a miracle cure and years before I read of Jews in Nazi death camps beseeching God for justice, I knew that asking for a radio, a thing, was ignoble—a vulgar abuse of my Protestant right to address the godhead directly. But I wanted the radio so much I persisted in my supplication.

Though I've never doubted that the impulse behind the two was pretty much the same, my childhood avarice, over time, changed into spiritual longing. In either case, I've wanted something I didn't have—whether it was a radio when I was ten, world peace when I was twenty, homes for the homeless when I was thirty, a job that offered personal fulfillment when I was forty, or spiritual serenity as I near fifty. I now scorn

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my youthful avarice and materialism, but at least, after months of bootless crying, I got the radio.

That answered prayer may have owed more to my earthly father's growing tired of my badgering than to my heavenly father's finally extending his grace. Or perhaps, as I was taught to think at church, my father was God's agent on earth. However I came by the radio, I was not allowed to take it to bed with me. My mother said, "Your bed is for sleeping in and nothing else, young man. You have no need for a radio there." And neither was I allowed to listen to country music. Songs about drinking, loving, and cheating were too adult for a young boy like me, my parents gravely informed me, putting their fingers precisely on the reason I was fascinated by them.

This was how prayers seemed to go. When I did get what I wanted, I got it in a way that was almost exactly like not getting it. Every child learns these lessons about the gap between expectation and reality, but in a Baptist family they are so tied to God, the giver of all blessings, that I came to understand him as an especially cunning lawyer who parsed every prayer, looking for loopholes, looking for perverse ways of answering the letter of my request while frustrating the spirit of it. Into the familiar Christian dialectic of the Old Testament God of wrath and the New Testament God of mercy, I insinuated a malicious, mocking figure—a Loki, a Coyote, a Pan, a Reynard the Fox. But I prayed to him anyway. I was expected to pray to him, and besides, who else had the power to give me the things I desired?

Except for trying to wheedle things out of God, I prayed hesitantly because, as a matter of principle, I'd never been taught how to pray. For Baptists, prayer was simply opening your soul to God, and how can that be taught? the preachers asked scornfully. Just talk to God, they said. From the grace we said before meals, I knew to offer thanks for food, and because it was the one thing always mentioned by the laymen who self-consciously and haltingly offered the public prayers during the Sunday services, I knew to be thankful for my health. My parents, grandparents, and the preachers also emphasized the importance of health. If you've got your health, they intoned, you've got everything. But even as I thanked God, I thought: But I've always had good health. Aren't you *supposed* to have good health? Isn't it something you should take for granted, and when you age and you no longer have it, isn't it like God is taking it away? I took these questions as evidence that I didn't have much aptitude for the more spiritual side of prayer. And the response I was getting from God—none—reinforced that sense. But I kept praying anyway.

Like 90 percent of Americans, I pray regularly. But unlike 96 percent of my fellow citizens, I'm not sure that I believe in God. It's an awkward, if not entirely untenable, position. The God I pray to is an external God, one who exists, if he exists, outside of me. I resist the idea

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of an internal God simply because it seems to me a slightly camouflaged way of worshiping myself, solipsism magnified to its most repulsive level. But of course, as I pray to the external God that I'm not sure is there, I'm also talking to myself, clarifying my own thoughts, trying to place myself in the spiritual tradition that I have inherited, trying to understand things that resist understanding. My prayers are then, despite my discomfort with an interior God, both centripetal and centrifugal, directed both inward and outward. And even if the external God does not exist, I benefit from the exercise of trying to put what is beyond words into words. In "East Coker," T. S. Eliot writes about words, speech, writing, but he might just as well be talking about prayer when he says that

> each venture
> Is a new beginning, a raid on the inarticulate
> With shabby equipment always deteriorating
> In the general mess of imprecision of feeling,
> Undisciplined squads of emotion. And what there is to conquer
> By strength and submission, has already been discovered
> Once or twice, or several times, by men whom one cannot hope
> To emulate—but there is no competition—
> There is only the fight to recover what has been lost
> And found and lost again and again: and now, under conditions
> That seem unpropitious. But perhaps neither gain nor loss.
> For us, there is only the trying. The rest is not our business.

I pray to reach outside myself, to position and understand myself against, beside, parallel to, and perhaps even at one with a God who very well may not exist, and in doing that I push, against my will sometimes, into self-understanding.

Though I've learned to pray mostly for my own moral and spiritual betterment, not for things, the hunger for God-knowledge has persisted and grown. The prayer I've prayed since I could see my way clear to formulate it when I was ten, eleven, twelve is "Let me hear a word from you. Let me know you are there." By the time I was fifteen I didn't even mind much if God said no to my petitions; I just wanted to hear the no. I'd have settled, I told myself, for the harsh response Job provoked from God. After God strips him of everything—health, fortune, family—Job finally cries out for justice, for an explanation: "Let the Almighty answer me!" The audacity of the demand thrills me as much now as it did when I was a teenager.

The King James Version tells us contemptuously that Job is "righteous in his own eyes," and God answers Job's perfectly reasonable questions with more questions, and trumps his bafflement with scorn:

> Then the Lord answered Job out of the whirlwind, and said,
> Who is this that darkeneth counsel by words without knowledge?

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> Gird up now thy loins like a man; for I will demand of thee, and answer thou me.
> Where wast thou when I laid the foundations of the earth? declare if thou hast understanding.
> Who hath laid the measures thereof, if thou knowest? or who hath stretched the line upon it?

Three chapters later God is still berating poor Job:

> Canst thou draw out leviathan with an hook? or his tongue with a cord which thou lettest down?
> Canst thou put an hook into his nose? or bore his jaw through with a thorn?
> Will he make many supplications unto thee? will he speak soft words unto thee? . . .
> None is so fierce that dare stir him up: who then is able to stand before me?
> Who hath prevented me, that I should repay him? whatsoever is under the whole heaven is mine.

Job's response to such hectoring is to "repent in dust and ashes":

> I know that thou canst do every thing, and that no thought can be withholden from thee.
> Who is he that hideth counsel without knowledge? therefore have I uttered that I understood not; things too wonderful for me, which I knew not.

I understood as a boy that God was pulling rank on Job. He was overwhelming Job with his magnificence, his realms of divine knowledge that left puny human understanding so far behind as to render it meaningless. Putting myself in Job's place, I resented God's tone of voice. I felt the way I did when my parents dismissed my questions by telling me that I wasn't supposed to understand, say, the lyrics of a country song about drinking and slipping around. Those were adult concerns and I would understand them when I was an adult. End of discussion.

Nonetheless, I was as thrilled by God's answer as I was by Job's question, just because it was an answer. Job was persuaded, as I was not, by the thunderously poetic non sequitur of God's reply, but at least Job knew for certain that he was struggling with a God who existed, and I envied him his certainty.

Certain or not, I've continued to pray, and as I've aged, I've taken more and more comfort in the idea of prayer as a way to help those who are beyond my help. One of my students is waiting to hear the results of her spinal tap. Does she have multiple sclerosis? She'll find out next

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week. Please, Lord, do not let this young woman have MS. Does it help? Or is praying merely a primitive denial of my own helplessness? I don't know. I hope for the former and fear the latter. But at the very least, I can say to her the next time I see her, "I'm praying for you," and that speaks to her, I hope, of a deeper level of human concern and connectedness than "Hey, Patty, I'm keeping my fingers crossed!"

Twenty years ago, while I was taking classes to prepare me for confirmation in the Episcopal Church (a process I decided not to go through with), I was taught a simple form of prayer: Adoration, Contrition, Thanksgiving, Supplication. The rector teaching the class helpfully pointed out that we could remember this because the first letters spelled out "Acts—as in the Acts of the Apostles." Though I cringed in embarrassment and then cringed again at my aesthetic response to the mnemonic device, I've used it virtually every night of my life since then.

The last three parts of the prayer give me no trouble. Contrition is useful. It's humbling to spend a few minutes every night reviewing and evaluating my day, trying to understand how I have failed to do right by others and by my own sense of myself. But I also try to look from what I take to be God's perspective at how I've lived my last twenty-four hours. And for a pessimist like me, a person too apt to get caught up in the pleasures of self-excoriation, remembering to move on and enumerate my blessings with gratitude is just as useful as contrition. Supplication, though I still occasionally lunge at it with my old transistor-radio greed, is starting to lose some of its grip on me. I am always slightly pleased when I wake up in the morning and realize that I've fallen asleep before I get to my list of desires.

But adoration flummoxes me. What possible gratification does an omnipotent being derive from my telling him how great he is? Flattering God with a list of his attributes seems like a primitive, even anachronistic, exercise. The few times I've tried it I've felt like an especially obsequious minor official from Bactria who, with his mouth hanging open, has entered Babylon through the gold and ivory of the Ishtar Gate. Ushered into the presence of Xerxes, the Great King, he mumbles his way through a memorized list of superlatives in a language he barely understands, and the Great King, who hears his own titles recited to him a hundred times a week, still listens closely, making sure the satraps pay him due reverence.

In trying to praise God, I also feel most strongly the troubling historical connections of Christianity to the worship of Baal and Mithras, and all the cults of the sacrificed god. Though I know the real purpose of praise is not to flatter God but to help me understand my proper relation to him, I balk at praising the presence who, if he exists, has presided in this century alone over two world wars, the Holocaust, the murder of the kulaks, the rape of Nanking, the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, the Chinese cultural revolution, the killing fields of Cambodia, and the

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influenza pandemic of 1918. The problem of theodicy—why does God allow evil in the world?—leads all too quickly to asking how, given all the evil in the world, there can be a God. I confess to, thank, and ask for help from a God whose existence I doubt, but to praise him without confidence in his existence and his goodness twists my tongue into baffled silence. Not knowing what else to do, I repeat by rote the opening words of the Lord's Prayer, trying to find some way to inhabit them.

My desire for the mystic took some non-Christian turns when, in high school, I began to read about occult practices. I'd lie on my bed for hours, trying to project my soul out of my body, up through the roof. I imagined my soul—me!—wafting through the Sheetrock and roof joists, through the pink fiberglass insulation, through the plywood sheathing, through the asphalt shingles, and up into the night sky. Still rising, I'd look down on my house and my neighborhood dwindling beneath me. It was always the night sky I rose into, even if I was attempting my astral projection as the Alabama sun pounded through the window. The sky was always full of stars, and I always floated with my arms held out from my sides, my hands and fingers feeling the wind that I knew I wouldn't feel if I were really pure soul.

And there I lost my grip on the vision that I was trying to make real. I couldn't truly imagine what it would be like to be a soul free in the air. Where would I go? What would I want to see? I could, I supposed, float into the houses of my friends and spy on them—or waft into the Statehouse and spy on government officials. I could even watch people make love, a subject about which I had much interest and no knowledge. But these seemed base uses of the gift I hoped to acquire, and in truth, I wasn't really interested in being a mystical Peeping Tom. Plus, I could never quite conceive of my soul as a free agent in the sky. Even in my best imaginings, my incorporeal soul was still subject to the vagaries of the wind, like a balloon or a kite. And like a kite, my imagined soul seemed anchored to the ground, to my body, to the house in which I lay on the bed, imagining—solid, earthbound, leaden. This was not astral projection. Even as a teenager, I suspected that my loving attention to Sheetrock and fiberglass kept me from slipping effortlessly through them. A real mystic, I thought, would know that all was maya, illusion. He wouldn't even think "roof" as he rose though an undifferentiated mass of material to swoop and gambol in midair, at play in the fields of the sky, freed of the limitations of flesh.

I realized that the only religion I was ever going to begin to understand as a faith, even if I didn't confidently share that faith, was the incarnational one I was born into. Christianity's deep divisions reflect my own. The incarnation of God in the body of Jesus, fully God and fully human at the same time, presents a Möbius strip of logic. It boggles my

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understanding, yet perfectly represents the way I experience my life, as my body and soul strain to go their separate ways while at the same time struggling for the unity that Christ represents. Pauline Christianity, with its all but horror of the corrupted body and its love of the pure soul, balances against the God who became the son of a rural carpenter. Christ, the Christian ideal, takes these opposing essences—body and soul—and fuses them into one essence, an act of philosophical synthesis that defies my understanding while it defines my yearning. And that yearning is so strong it holds my natural skepticism in yet another uneasy balance.

When I was a boy, thirteen or fourteen, I prayed my truest prayers in bed, after the family prayers had been said and the light snapped out. This was my real praying, pouring out to God what I hoped was my soul. After the "Amen," I'd masturbate, and then, wretched with guilt, I'd pray again, pleading for forgiveness. But why should God forgive me? We both knew I was going to commit the same sin again, perhaps within the next fifteen minutes. My prayers and my sins wound around each other in an orgy of urgency, release, guilt, and terror of hellfire that repeated itself nightly and often several times a night. This lascivious cycle of despair prepared me to read the *Inferno* with the eyes of one of Dante's sinners, or *Pilgrim's Progress* with the eyes of one of the many pilgrims who founder in the Slough of Despond and never come near the Celestial City. To me, those books felt absolutely contemporary, a vital reflection of life as I and many of the people around me understood it.

Now, though, I see those frantic bouts of prayer and release as complementary. The hoped-for ecstatic union of the body in sex directly parallels the hoped-for ecstatic union of the soul with God in prayer: bodily and spiritual intercourse. Under the sweat-damp sheets of my bed, I was discovering a metaphor that the mystics have known since at least the Song of Songs. Whitman sang it in "Song of Myself," and even the medieval church tacitly acknowledged it in one of the legends collected in *The Little Flowers of Saint Francis*. While Francis is in Babylonia (where, by the way, he secretly converts the sultan to Catholicism), he is approached by a lustful woman. He works out a deal with her. If she will do what he wants, then he will do what she wants.

She accepts, and suggests that they immediately prepare a bed for their lovemaking. But Francis says, "Come with me, and I will show you a very beautiful bed," and he leads her to the large fire burning in the central hearth of the house:

> And in fervor of spirit he stripped himself naked and threw himself down in the fireplace as on a bed. And he called to her, saying: "Undress and come quickly and enjoy this splendid, flowery, and wonderful bed, because you must be here if you wish to obey me!"

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> And he remained there for a long time with joyful face, resting on the fireplace as thougl on flowers, but the fire did not burn or singe him.

The legend tells us only that the woman was so terrified and remorseful at seeing the miracle that she converted on the spot and "became so holy in grace that she won many souls for the Lord in that region." What is left for us to understand is that when the woman saw Francis lounging luxuriously in the fire, she saw the purified vision of the longing for passion, union, ecstasy, and fulfillment that had driven her to prostitute herself.

Even now I envy this fictional character the unambiguous certainty of her sudden faith. In those intense, troubled nights, I too was reaching out desperately for the God I already doubted, asking for a word, for some assurance that the body was not all I had, that the material world was not the only world. I heard nothing.

Through my late teens and into my middle twenties, I declared myself an agnostic, even an atheist. Still, I never quite stopped praying. It was too natural a part of my life for me to stop.

But three times—long after I quit consciously listening—I have heard God's voice speak directly to me. I wonder what the average number is for a man my age.

The first time I have forgotten almost entirely. My first wife and I were separated and I was on the edge, I suspect, of a nervous breakdown. One morning in the bathroom, shaving, I heard a voice clearly not my own say something to me. Whatever the voice said, it was something so trivial and inscrutable that I laughed out loud. Still, I was thrilled to have heard the voice, and for a day or two I felt a sense of serenity and otherworldly detachment that I had never felt before. I'm sorry, but those clichés, which are almost invariably used to describe experiences like this, are all I have to offer. As I knew it would, the sense of peace dwindled over the next three days. But in that short period of grace, I laughed at and accepted my own immediate questioning of what had happened: "This could just be stress. People often hear voices when they are stressed." "If it was really God, why didn't he tell you something useful?" "If it was really God, why do you find it so hard to remember what he said?" Whatever I heard, it was already abandoning me, sliding out of my mind, and I didn't want to write it down because I knew it would look silly in print.

I never mentioned to anyone that I'd heard the voice. I was too embarrassed to talk about it. And I distrusted it. I thought I might be nuts. I have talked to myself all my life, and my mother, who was both amused and slightly disturbed by this habit, used to say, "It's okay to talk to yourself, but when you start hearing answers, you know you're in trouble." I also remembered a strange psychology class I had taken at Huntingdon College, a small Methodist school in my hometown of Mont-

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gomery, Alabama. Dr. Statum, the hard-nosed psychologist who taught the class, told us that one of the questions frequently asked on psychological tests was "Do you hear God talking to you?" Since he was a born-again Christian, he always answered yes. He paused to let that sink in. Someone in the class tittered nervously. But we should remember, he went on, that answering yes to one of the "trick" questions wasn't enough to get you declared insane. You had to answer yes to several of them before you were deemed truly, clinically over the line. His point was that psychological exams didn't really know how to deal with religious people, so they simply built in some slack.

For a long time, I pondered Dr. Statum's comfortable acceptance of the idea that many religious people had at least one of the primary earmarks of insanity, unsure what to make of it or of him. And I wondered what it meant about my father and all the people I sat next to in church every Sunday. Now, though, I returned to that moment in Dr. Statum's class for reassurance. Sure, I'd heard a voice speak to me out of thin air, and my impulse at the time—and my impulse now—was to think it was the voice of God. If it was, I wasn't crazy. And if it wasn't—well, Dr. Statum (I reminded myself) had said that you had to have more than one symptom before you were officially nuts.

In truth, I didn't worry too much about my sanity. The experience was clearly a positive one, and through a difficult time in my life, I was buoyed by the idea that God had spoken to me and reassured me—while I also held in mind the understanding that I might have had a momentary schizophrenic delusion. Though I did not know it at the time, the voice I heard meets the third of St. Ignatius's "Rules for the Discernment of Spirits": "I call consolation any increase of faith, hope, and charity and any interior joy that calls and attracts to heavenly things." In *St. Ignatius of Loyola: The Psychology of a Saint,* W. W. Meissner, who is both a Jesuit and a psychiatrist, considers Ignatius's own mystical visions. "Was Ignatius psychotic?" he asks.

Meissner admits that some psychiatrists "have not hesitated to call mystical phenomena psychotic." Both psychotics and mystics see visions (or, more rarely, hear voices), fall passive during the experience, develop a sense of mission, lose a sense of time and space, and undergo rapid mood shifts. And both are ashamed of the experience; it belongs to a realm that cannot be shared with others. But Meissner seems to be more persuaded by scholars who point out that mystics, unlike psychotics, maintain a steady grasp on reality, are humble rather than self-aggrandizing, and possess a "serene optimism." Meissner quotes the psychiatrist Silvano Arieti as saying, "Religious and mystical experiences seem instead to result in a strengthening and enriching of the personality." Meissner answers his question about Ignatius's sanity by saying that a modern psychiatrist, diagnosing the future saint's condition in the turmoil sur-

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rounding his conversion, might well have concluded he was psychotic. But psychosis would have been the last word that would have sprung to mind if he or she had examined the extraordinarily self-possessed and forceful Ignatius who governed the Society of Jesus and conducted its "world-wide operations and complex and difficult relations with royalty and the papal court."

While the voice I heard is small spiritual potatoes next to Ignatius's visionary feast, the saint, like me, was sometimes absentminded about what had been served at the banquet. In his autobiography, which is told in the third person, Ignatius records that God unveiled to him how the world was created, but he has forgotten the details: "One time the manner in which God had created the world was revealed to his understanding with great spiritual joy. He seemed to see something white, from which some rays were coming, and God made light from this. But he did not know how to explain these things, nor did he remember very well the spiritual enlightenment that God was pressing on his soul at that time."

I remember more clearly the second time I heard God's voice. I was visiting my father in north Alabama while the woman I am now married to was in California. She and I weren't seeing each other at the time. She had some personal problems to sort out without the distraction of a man in her life. Wondering if I was being strung along or manipulated by a woman I didn't yet know very well, and wondering if I should forget her and move on, I was agitated and unhappy. All this was in my head as I got up one morning and made the bed. The bedspread was in midair, ballooned above the mattress, when I heard a voice say, as clear as God calling Samuel's name in the night, "Isn't she doing everything she can?"

Immediately I felt a sense of calmness. Yes, I said to myself. Yes, she is doing everything she can.

Pondering what had happened, I walked into the dining room and had breakfast with my dad. I sipped my coffee, ate my Raisin Bran, and read the *Birmingham News* in silence, trying to hold onto the moment for a little longer before it began to fade into the noise of everyday life. I did not tell my father what had happened. What could I say—"Hey, Dad, I just heard God talk to me in your guest bedroom, and he was offering advice for the lovelorn"? Of course, as I munched my Raisin Bran, I was already wondering why God, if that is who it was, talked to me only when women abandoned me. And why did God ask a question? Why didn't he just *tell* me that she was doing everything she could? But the question the voice asked was clearly rhetorical. It presupposed its answer. And the slightly comic nature of the whole scene reassured me. My love life, though important to me, hardly seemed of divine importance. Perhaps that's the point—that the first two times I heard God speak to me, he was concerned with my personal life. That's not what I expected.

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When I had prayed as a boy for God to speak to me, I had both longed for and dreaded the words that he might say. From all the stories I'd heard preachers tell, from all the devotional books I'd read, and from the Bible itself, I thought God almost invariably called the unbeliever to believe and the believer to preach. I was afraid that God would order me to be a missionary or a street-corner preacher. I was truly terrified that God would tell me to spend my life serving the poor. In church, as the preachers exalted evangelists like Billy Sunday and Billy Graham and missionaries like Lottie Moon, I identified both with these religious models and with Jonah sailing in the opposite direction from Nineveh, where God had commanded him to go. I even identified fully with Jonah's rage at God for showing mercy and sparing Nineveh. After Jonah had walked through that great city crying that God would destroy it in forty days, the people fasted, covered themselves and their beasts with sackcloth and ashes, and repented. But what gratification is there in actually being listened to when you had relished the image of God striking dead all the unbelievers who had scorned and mocked you?

From my childhood fear of being called by God, I well understood Jonah's petulance and rage. When my father and the other deacons in his church went witnessing door to door, I shrank from them, afraid they'd ask me to accompany them and testify to strangers. Sharing their greatest happiness and their faith in eternal life was meant as an act of generosity, but confronting complete strangers with one's beliefs has always seemed to me like a very intimate violation of other people's selfhood. I spent many childhood hours imagining how I would do it, and how I would respond when people brushed me off, as I would brush them off if our positions were reversed.

Though I have known plenty of born-again preachers, I have known only one person who underwent a dramatic conversion, like the one I feared, and became a street-corner evangelist. When I was teaching part-time at a small university in Montgomery, I'd sometimes go out for drinks after class with the older students. One of the regulars was a rowdy chop-haired blonde in her mid-twenties. Part hippie, part redneck, Liz drank as heavily as men who outweighed her by eighty pounds and smoked unfiltered Camels as if smoke were sustenance. She left her illegitimate child with her mother, and though she talked about him a lot, she never seemed in a hurry to get home. She wore cheap tube tops and tight jeans artfully frayed to single threads across her thighs, and she laughed with a rough hee-haw that I loved.

Several months after the class ended, Liz called and told me that she'd been born again. She'd moved back in with her mother. She'd noticed me driving by her mother's house on my way to visit my girlfriend, and she wondered if I'd like to stop by for a cup of coffee.

At her mother's kitchen table, she told me about her ministry, and

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whenever her eyes grew faraway as she got lost in the telling, I studied her face. She looked relaxed, almost peaceful, telling of the rebuffs she'd suffered as she, along with her new preacher Brother James, witnessed for two days every week on street corners in downtown Montgomery. They worked twelve-hour days, exhorting crowds, stopping passersby, and simply preaching to the empty street when there were no people to preach to. Her clothes were clean and modest. She didn't smoke, she didn't swear, she didn't drink, and she was plowing ahead at school, determined to get her degree and go on to a small seminary I hadn't heard of. But as she told stories about the rude remarks and threats that people made while she was witnessing, she occasionally let out one of those vulgar, braying laughs that I admired.

When her son—he looked to be about ten—wandered into the kitchen and demanded orange juice, she politely told him that she was talking and she'd get him some juice when she was done.

"I want it now. Now! Now! Now!" he chanted in an ascending pitch, his face turning purple.

Liz grabbed him by the upper arm and swung him around till he was face to face with her. "Mommy said she'd get you some juice in a minute. But you are not allowed to interrupt me when I'm talking to company."

The boy sucked a long breath, preparing to scream. Liz held up the index finger of her right hand and said, "Johnny, don't act like a baby. If I have to spank you, I will."

He snuffled for a moment or two, and then leaned forward, resting his head on her arm for a few moments. She gave him a quick hug. "You go play and I'll bring you your juice in a few minutes."

While he was still in the room she gave me a quick, apologetic smile, and said to me, but speaking so he could hear, "It's hard for him. I let him run wild for ten years and it's hard for him to learn that he now has a mother here to take care of him."

As I left, she said—she said it casually when I paused at the door to say good-bye—"You know I pray for you."

That simple sentence ran me through a whole array of emotions as I stood in her mother's doorway, looking at as changed a human being as I have ever seen in my life, and changed for the better.

"Thank you," I said. "Thank you." I was supposed to say, "I'm praying for you too," but I couldn't get the words out of my mouth.

When I was younger, between about twelve and twenty-five, I hated it when people told me they were praying for me. And I hated it even more when they didn't say it but I could tell from the look on their faces that they were mentally adding me to their prayer lists. I hated it with the passion of a self-conscious boy and young man who wanted to think he was invisible, unnoticed by adults. Also, I perceived other people's prayers as their desire to coerce me mystically—prayer as the voodoo of the

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middle class. I thought that, under the guise of caring for me, they were using God as an invisible robot arm to make me do things that they couldn't make me do themselves: join the church, be a better student, stay out of trouble. I felt as if I were a billiard ball that might not be making its true run across the table because they were using God as a sort of mystical body English to affect my movements, even to tilt the table.

But now that I have a stronger, steadily stronger, sense of mortality and of the limitations of human effort, I find myself longing for their prayers. I want the table tilted. I want to be remembered by them, and I have a superstitious faith in the faith of believers like my wife, my father, my cousin Julie, my friend Randall. And of course if I want them to pray for me, I have to pray for them. It is unthinkable that I would withhold my prayers from those who pray for me, just because I am skeptical that my words to God do any good.

The only other time, the most recent time, I heard God speak, his voice was coming out of my mouth. One morning several years ago, as I woke from a deep sleep, I was chanting "God loves me" over and over again—a slow, intense, two-beat repetition that was part of my own breathing. "God," I said, as I inhaled. "Loves me," I said, as I exhaled. I lay in bed awake for fifteen or twenty minutes, repeating "God loves me" as if possessed. At any time during those fifteen minutes, I could have stopped myself with a simple act of will. But why would I want to? The feeling was wholly pleasurable, and deeply reassuring on any number of levels—personal, spiritual, and even intellectual. I'm well acquainted with Carlyle's "The Everlasting No." This was my strongest brush with "the EVERLASTING YEA, wherein all contradiction is solved: wherein whoso walks and works, it is well with him." I think of this voice as God's because it said something that until then I would never have said myself, and it is in fact something that I don't say even now, except sometimes late at night when I am having trouble sleeping. Then, I will try to work my way back into the strange, serene rhythm of that morning: "God" on the in-breath, "loves me" on the out-breath.

So of the three times I have heard God's voice, I remember two sentences: an embarrassingly personal rhetorical question and Christianity's most mind-numbingly obvious cliché. But I hear the Sunday school simplicity of the phrase "God loves me" as a reminder that spiritually I am a beginner, a child, a tyro—and that before I can go any further I must absorb this basic lesson. Sometimes the most basic lesson is the most profound. Toward the end of his life, Karl Barth, in a story that has become a favorite of contemporary pulpits, was asked if he could sum up his lifework in systematic theology. He replied with the words of the children's song, "Jesus loves me, this I know, for the Bible tells me so."

I feel especially grateful for the last voice. I feel God put those words

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in my mouth because I would never say them myself; I would never even begin to feel the feeling without his forcing the issue. In my mouthing of the cliché there is the odd mixture of divine subtlety and ham-handedness that the mystics speak of. And despite my doubts and misgivings, I believe, with a tentative and anxious faith, that my prayers for a sense of the presence of the godhead are being answered. The next step is harder; it's even more daunting than trying to believe that God loves me. In Carlyle's *Sartor Resartus,* the phrase immediately before "This is the EVERLASTING YEA" is "Love God." But for me that is like looking at the last chapter of the trigonometry text on the first day of class. I can't imagine ever getting there.

Sometimes I ransack various translations of the Bible, trying to get a grip on a verse that eludes me. For a long time I was puzzled by a sentence from John 5:17. "My Father worketh hitherto, and I work" is how the King James Version renders it. "Hitherto what?" I wondered, until, after some years, curiosity overtook lethargy and I checked other translations. "My Father is working still, and I am working," says the Revised Standard Version. The New Jerusalem Bible is even clearer: "My Father goes on working, and so do I."

On the in-breath: "God." If he exists. On the out-breath: "Loves me."

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After the Flood

CATHARINE SAVAGE BROSMAN

Water is very much on my mind this late-spring day, after what the meteorologists called a "train" of thick black clouds formed to the southwest and settled over New Orleans and the rest of south Louisiana this past Monday, dumping its load and redumping the next day as the overladen clouds burst again, finally emptying twenty-four inches of rain on parts of Lake Pontchartrain and eighteen inches around my place in the Garden District. For a sunken, marshy city that is mostly below sea level—a city where pumps, some of them relics of the past century, must replace gravity as draining agents, drawing the wet stuff into canals, thence into already swollen lakes, bayous, and rivers—this is no petty event.

Water seeks its level; and here it is a great leveler, and not just of terrain, as it erodes irregularities and spreads alluvial soils. The less prosperous residents of Harvey and Marrero on the West Bank, or of Kenner, or of the lower portions of St. Bernard, St. Charles, and St. Tammany Parishes, where swamps were solidified just enough to allow developers to get signatures on contracts for modest dwellings—these folk have once again been flooded out, with three or four feet of water in their houses, and cars filled to the dashboards. Some of them had been through the same thing exactly one month ago, a lesser flood but enough to ruin the carpet, installed perhaps after a previous inundation, and soak everything in the garage. But the identical thing happens also to families who have fashionable addresses on Nashville and Jefferson Avenues in Uptown,

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whose "basements" (ground-level areas for storage or dens or children's rooms) can easily take on three feet of water; and there are no fewer flooded cars along the most elegant parts of St. Charles Avenue than in many neighborhoods of lesser cachet.

In the flood of May 3, 1978, an acquaintance of mine rode his freezer (not *rowed*, however—no paddle) on the choppy waters of his basement. Another Uptowner I know has just started cleaning up this morning after his fourteenth inundation. Friends keep telling him to sell his place and move to a high-rise, perhaps the one where I now live; but since he is an honest man, selling will not be facilitated by these repeated drenchings. Countless other Uptown residents I know have lost their cars and other possessions. The difference between them and the unfortunate people who bought affordable properties in such too-aptly-named areas as the River Vista subdivision in Mandeville or Lake Estates upriver is that my friends have the resources to dig themselves out of the sludge and to replace what the waters consumed.

This year, when the rains started ("Chance of thunderstorms," the weatherman had said at 5:20 P.M.—the same forecast given most evenings in spring and summer), I was in the Crêpe Nanou restaurant, a French place on Robert Street between Prytania and St. Charles Avenue, with two students, one of whose academic success we were celebrating a few days before her Ph.D. was to be conferred. It had already started raining some time before we were to meet. After we were seated, a populous corps de ballet of waterdrops began to dance down the front windows, nerve-knocking thunder interrupted our conversation, and lightning was reflected in the tall mirrors. But come—this is New Orleans: one is not deterred by rain. We continued our meal at a civilized pace. Dinner was nearly over, and we were just about to order the *crêpes marron* when nature decided to turn off the electricity, and there went the chance for a dessert cooked to order. No matter; we paid by candlelight and made ready to leave. Robert Street was already flooded. Pascale, who was dressed in slacks, having originally planned to come by bicycle, brought around Melanie's car, so that the two of us in good dresses and high heels could step in nimbly right on the sidewalk. Perhaps, we thought, we can go for dessert to a restaurant where a new pastry chef who perfected his trade in Paris keeps urging us to taste his wares. Down St. Charles, however, the water got deeper. The restaurant was in a pond, inaccessible.

Well, we would go to my place and eat leftover cake from the Winn-Dixie. Melanie's low-slung red Toyota could not handle St. Charles any further. We switched to Prytania Street and churned our way through the waves, riding the high middle of the street, barely getting past Touro Infirmary and through the sunken intersection at Louisiana Avenue. On Second Street, Melanie parked her car on the sidewalk—at a sufficient remove, we supposed, from the street currents—and we went up to my

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apartment on the seventh floor, whence we had a splendid view of lightning beyond the twin bridges across the Mississippi, rain shooting at us horizontally, and steadily rising water, soon sidewalk-high, visible (even after the streetlamps and every other light in a 180-degree arc went out) in the flashes, bright as dawn.

The upshot of the evening was that the girls spent the night with me, we had no electricity for twelve hours, and three days later, the Toyota, undrivable, has just been hauled off, along with thousands of similarly derelict vehicles. Others have had much worse experiences and lived to tell of them, and at least six are dead. More, most likely. Some vagrants whom no one has missed probably got carried away. Moreover, during floods it is easier than usual to get rid of someone you don't want—taking advantage of, or provoking, helplessness, and then dumping the body into a watery grave, not even bothering to drive to St. Charles or St. James Parish to throw it into the swamp.

Yet this unwanted water, which has reappeared in salty form on the cheeks of some as they survey their disappearing gardens and sodden floors, and contemplate the loss of many of their worldly goods, is a vital liquid, one of the elements to which we owe life. In the beginning, God's spirit moved upon the waters. We are told by evolutionists that land-based life evolved from the sea. A human embryo, cradled in its insulating liquid, goes through a fish stage; such early features as the gill-like pharyngeal slits, which as the fetus matures turn into other structures, including the middle ear, underline our kinship with the finny tribe. Baptism by fire through the Holy Spirit may be the supreme sign of cleansing and renewal, but most of us are fit only for a lesser experience, which water affords both symbolically and practically. St. John himself, perhaps one of the baptizing Essenes, stood in the Jordan River, immersing all those seeking purification, including the One whose shoes he was not worthy to untie.

As a Westerner, born in Colorado and reared mostly there, I remain fascinated with whatever flows, and note that *flowing* is a pleasing quality in many things, including dance gowns, landscapes, a starry stream in the firmament, conversation in a foreign tongue ("fluency"), painting, sculpture, music, and prose. (I shall not include "cash," as in "cash flow." While favorable, the latter denotes nothing aesthetic.) Having learned to swim, tardily, at age seventeen, I like to feel the waves of the warm Gulf bathe me, one after the other. I enjoy the broad prospect of the Mississippi from Audubon Park or near Jackson Square in the French Quarter; it is truly a continental artery, massive, totally unlike the streams I was once accustomed to, and as cultural as a natural feature can be. Fresh rain, by its sound and scent, delights me, as does the sight of clouds at the horizon with their burden scrimming down, highlighted by the sun's great spotlight. From the age of ten, when my family initially moved to

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Texas and I first saw the Gulf of Mexico, through my early crossings of the Atlantic (by the French liners *Flandre* and *Liberté*) and my first visits to the Mediterranean, to the time when I lived in Florida, to my long years here near the Mississippi Sound, I have been drawn to the sea. Some of my favorite poems concern the ocean—Paul Valéry's "Le Cimetière marin," for instance, and Jules Supervielle's lyrics from his twenty-two ocean crossings between Europe and South America. I even have special affection for music with the theme of water—Debussy's "La Mer," Ravel's "Jeux d'eau," Mendelssohn's "Calm Sea and Prosperous Voyage," and particularly Handel's "Water Music," which I have known since childhood but have never enjoyed more than at a concert in an amphitheater in Greece, not far from Odysseus's archetypical sea, which is the source of so much of the literary imagination.

A generous spring storm never hits here without my thinking of Western ranchlands such as those of the Big Bend, where, after a few years back in Colorado, my parents settled permanently. There, the cult of rain equals that of the native peoples of the Southwest, with their careful channeling of mesa rivulets and their elaborate rituals intended to draw the life-giving liquid from the will of the gods and the clouds' abundance. My father watered our trees from crystalline wells, returning to the ground at selected spots, for our pleasure and the earth's adornment, what the ground had given. For Big Bend ranchers who came into town to get the mail or supplies, it was more than casual talk to compare rainfall amounts for the season—a contest usually won by those who ranched north of Alpine, in or near the Davis Mountains, which catch what moisture there is, leaving for the others nothing but dry rumblings of thunder and a streaked sky in the distance.

Preposterous though it be, the wish sometimes forms in me to ship out our superfluous Louisiana storms for my *compañeros* in Texas and New Mexico, to whom a little would mean much. I have read that projects have been conceived to convey water from the Columbia River down to California by means of a gargantuan ocean-floor pipeline. The scheme of transporting rain from New Orleans is still more harebrained. And in truth, of course, the West could not accept such largesse, or at least not in the quantities we have at our disposal. The soil here is spongy, used to being soaked, and protected by plants, and we have canals and ditches dug expressly for overflow. But two inches can fill a west Texas arroyo, and a twenty-inch rain in an arid land would swell the creeks and inundate dry creek beds; cover roads and pastures; drown antelope, cattle, sheep, goats, and horses on the range; carry off the sparse and precarious, if spiny, vegetation and what little topsoil has been left by the winds; ruin many dwellings, adobe or frame; and, as when the town of Sanderson was half destroyed, take the lives of many who make a difficult living from a dry world. Years ago, the Pecos River bridge on

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U.S. Highway 90, built solidly into the black rock well above water level, was carried away when the canyon was flooded by downpours that the desert ranges could not absorb. If the replacement bridge—at the level of the high edges—is ever washed out, much of west Texas will go also.

Meditating on these matters, one observes that the scope of human needs, capacity, and endurance is in fact extremely narrow. Between the shriveling of plant life and the painful death of sentient beings through deprivation of water, on the one hand, and, on the other, a surfeit sufficient to destroy vegetation and drown most animal life (or at least inconvenience it mightily), runs the strip of possibility. In the early 1930s, Antoine de Saint-Exupéry nearly drowned when his plane crashed in the Mediterranean. A few years later, he came close to dying again after his engine failed and he was downed in the Libyan desert, where he and his mechanic endured nearly five days without liquid, having salvaged from their airplane only half an orange and a little wine in a thermos. They were rescued when, hallucinating and barely conscious, they stumbled into the path of a solitary Bedouin—simply "man," as Saint-Exupéry called him.

Composed mostly of H_2O, we require it, yet cannot handle much of it unless it is confined or we are insulated from it. The same limitations obtain with heat, and cold, and sunlight, and a host of other things. The Greeks, while sensitive to what they (and I) see as man's proper place and home in the natural world, recognized these limitations, among others, and would have considered it hubris to ignore them and violate the rule of moderation. "Nothing to excess," one of them said. We all navigate a narrow channel between too shallow and too deep. Let the pillows in the hotel not be thick and hard, or I shall not sleep at all; on the other hand, I want *something* substantial between my head and the mattress. We cannot really take *anything*, not even our greatest delights, except in moderate quantities. We barely belong in this universe, with its extremes of temperatures, and its inconceivable magnitude of astrophysical activities, distances, and time. "My field is time," said Goethe. But, except in relation to that of the microworld—the *ciron*, or "mite," to which the philosopher Pascal contrasted the boundless heavens—this time is so greatly limited as to resemble a rivulet, on which a child guides a paper boat, streaming eventually into the flooded plain of infinity. And of our time, only the middle portion, between dependent childhood and frail old age, is of much use—the high ground, like that hump on which Melanie steered the red Toyota through the waters of Prytania Street.

When Robert Frost wondered whether the world would end in fire or in ice, perhaps he should have added water as a third alternative. After all, according to the Hebrew scriptures, God's first generalized act of wrath against his rebellious creation was by water; geological evi-

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dence offers some support for the prototypical flood. Certainly, water once covered much more of the planet than at present: shells are found in landlocked mountainous regions, and calcareous layers in high altitudes are the residue of innumerable sea organisms. We have had abundant intimations recently that the earth may be returning to this aqueous state. *Après nous le déluge.* This is especially true where human beings have meddled in things as much as they have in south Louisiana—innumerable levees built by the Army Corps of Engineers, the state, and the Levee Board; marshes drained to make way for asphalt; trees felled; and, most particularly, the Mississippi River turned aside from the channel it clearly *wishes* to take, through the Atchafalaya Basin, and obliged, for the moment, to follow the course we have chosen. In a few millennia, even if these acts of interference were all reversed, this part of the world might be underwater anyway. We are told that the greenhouse effect, brought about by the thinning of the ozone layer through our overproduction of carbon dioxide and the spewing of fluorocarbons from aerosol cans and such, will so warm the earth that the polar ice caps will melt and crumble at the edges, thereby raising ocean levels over the entire planet and possibly flooding coastal areas on every continent, including the East Coast population centers, almost the entirety of Florida (high point 345 feet), and all of south Louisiana.

These last few days, some of us may have become islands in a postdiluvian sea: a sea that, like almost everything else, is expansionist, seeking to rejoin its brethren the Mississippi, the lakes (Pontchartrain, Catherine, Borgne, Maurepas, Salvador, Des Allemands), the swamps, and the bayous, all of which soon may be joined, taking us with them, in a vast, embracing union. (In the Venetian Republic, the doge used to be "wed" annually to the sea in a ceremony fraught with cultural and anthropological meanings.) But islands we are not. Donne doubtless had something else in mind, but he was right anyway. Snowmelt and rain upstream swell the rivers here and flood towns in between; toxic chemicals from the "Cancer Corridor" between Baton Rouge and New Orleans run downstream and poison marine life; acid rain and surface pollution have made the Great Lakes moribund; and evil, doubtless, spreads even more certainly, if insidiously. Our degraded ethical practices and civic and moral flaws reach others by contagion, not merely spreading, but worsening, in a serial fashion by which reactions produce counter-reactions. This week, in a different, and heartening, illustration of solidarity, many people, including some of very modest station, have given to flood victims they do not know their support in the form of friendship and money. The term is an "outpouring" of generosity—a flow from the human spirit that recognizes the predicament of fellows.

There is still another sort of connectedness, that to our primitive ancestors, whose ties with the natural world were so much more closely

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and constantly knit than ours, and to those less remote dwellers in the eastern Mediterranean, with their mythologies of nature, in which they wove also the human dream of the supranatural, each penetrating the other. We dream of everything that is impossible, imagining that we have other faculties, living other lives, being what and where we are not; and many of those dreams have to do with intimacy with and mastery over nature in the form of its four elements, which, by virtue of their very contrasts, come to mind as a cluster, the idea of water calling forth its complements of air, earth, and fire. Their mythological embodiments still have a place in our literary imagination. Hermes sped about the earth with a winged helmet and feet, Icarus flew on wings of feathers and wax toward the heavens, the steeds of Helios crossed the sky each day, and Pegasus rose ultimately to the place of the gods. Descending into the earth itself, Orpheus and Persephone visited the underworld. Various mythological birds and salamanders, dwelling in fire, expressed the unrealizable vision of being burnt and refined to purity without being destroyed; the phoenix rises from its ashes. Thanks to the whale's body, Jonah dwelt in the seas, and Poseidon, along with naiads, Nereids, and many others, incarnated the human desire to live in and exercise sovereignty over the water. Some myths seem to unite all these archetypes. Zeus, born in a cave, dwelt in the Olympian ether, distributed rain, and hurled lightning bolts as the heavens stormed. Through syncretism, presumably, they are all found in the Christian corpus: Christ was baptized and walked on water; the Holy Spirit descended in tongues of fire; after a descent into hell—the underworld—Christ ascended into the heavens (Apollinaire wrote in "Zone" that he "rises better than aviators and holds the world's record for height").

I have mentioned my special liking for water. In memory, I can still see, hear, and feel the cold, bubbling creeks of the Colorado mountains of my childhood—little Redskin Creek near my grandmother's cabin, merely a pace wide, which we used as a refrigerator by placing an immense crock among the pebbles, and Vasquez Creek and the Gunnison River, where, later, I went fishing with my father. But I have also a feeling for air—the wind coming across the range, or the invisible movement of high currents driving clouds, or an airy evening on the porch, all windows open; and for earth—a cool pine-needle bed under the ponderosas, or the sandy soils of the Big Bend, shaded from burnt red to yellow, tan, and chalky white; and for fire, perhaps outdoors after a meal, or in a country house in winter, an invitation to fellowship or lovemaking.

Much of this is connected not just to origins—the water we came from, the land that received us, the air we breathe, the warming hearths of our primitive cave homes—but to ends. We all have fantasies of returning to the breast of the earth, of seeing the earth purified by refiners' fires. I never forget my uncle Jack, who died in the Battle of the Philippine Sea and was

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committed to the waves of Leyte Gulf ("Die at sea, lie at sea"). In Isaiah's words, "The earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea." Despite the wrath of biblical deluge, this eschatalogical vision refreshes us: doubtless all but the most corrupt, the truly evil, thirst after righteousness, though they may not know it. The French word *crue*, meaning the level of floodwaters, is identical to a term for *growth* and connected to *cru*, "crop or vintage"—all from *croître*, "to increase"—as though we could not progress, nor the earth develop, without these vital, overflowing waters that make plains and valleys fertile and nourish our souls.

Unlike many nineteenth-century writers, however, I do not wish, on the basis of these reflections about nature and human experience, to elucidate further the relationship between them, or to connect them to the mind of God. Closer to the phenomenologists, I *observe*—seeing the limitations of this observation, and the impossibility, whether through science or poetry, of going beyond it. Water *is*. The rest is our human embroidering. Even though I see my own freedom in images of water—the swiftness of a mountain stream, the easy and rhythmic motion of waves, the vast perspective of the ocean—that feeling cannot be traced beyond my images and my inner, unprovable conviction that it is there. Yet if I were absolutely obliged to draw ontological conclusions concerning nature, they would be pantheistic. Surely the belief that God, or some other cosmic power, is everywhere, even in nature's destructiveness, is no less worthy than that which posits a benevolent, all-wise deity who nevertheless allows the existence of evil. Of course, I do not set this forth as a theology; it is more a disclaimer.

Three full days after the floodwaters receded, the New Orleans skies are generally overcast. We have had more cloudbursts, happily of short duration. More than once, the sun has shown a bit of its face, though it has never entirely pushed aside the lumpy gray curtain, whether through unwonted timidity or through shame at having let itself be eclipsed so long by a mere storm. After many hours of absence (the tracks were impassable), the streetcars are once more running on St. Charles Avenue, their music of motors, rails, and bells making sleep possible again. The meteorologists predict fair weather for the weekend. *Après la pluie, le beau temps*, says, plainly, the French proverb, in an oblique recognition that human fate too, while changeable and unpredictable, usually provides some blessings after great trials. The wheel of fortune turns, as does the world, and imbalances usually will be righted, one way or another.

Some imbalances cannot, however, be redressed by any act of man; and among them is, almost surely, the repeated flooding of New Orleans and the areas that surround it. This spot attracted the early explorers because they found an easy portage route from the Mississippi to Bayou

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St. John, which flows into Lake Pontchartrain, giving access to the Gulf of Mexico, which was otherwise more than a hundred miles downstream. The facility of water trade was what led to the development of a city. But surely it was unwise to presume as much since then as we have with respect to nature, destroying the natural drainage of marshlands by paving open spaces, dredging bayous, constructing dikes and roads (which act as dikes), and other measures by which we redesign the natural topography. Water has taught us again this week the disadvantages, indeed the dangers, of such intervention, at the same time that it has underlined our solidarity and given, to some at least, an experience of sharing that suggests how a few remedies might be devised in common. Perhaps the lesson is not quite over: as I look out my windows toward the avenue, I see a field of umbrellas suddenly popping open, like flowers in a cartoon. "On such a full sea are we now afloat," as Brutus says in *Julius Caesar,* that we can't absorb much more. But above the twin bridges over the Mississippi, bright rays that pierce the clouds are transforming the rain into a dazzling screen of light, and the watery roofs and spires around me have turned to silver.

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THE UNCERTAIN ART

The True Healers

SHERWIN B. NULAND

Men are men before they are lawyers, or physicians, or merchants, or manufacturers; and if you make them capable and sensible men, they will make themselves capable and sensitive lawyers or physicians. What professional men should carry away with them from an University, is not professional knowledge, but that which should direct the use of their professional knowledge, and bring the light of general culture to illuminate the technicalities of a general pursuit.

John Stuart Mill, Inaugural Address as Rector of St. Andrew's University, 1867

Training is not the same as education. When the Carnegie Foundation's Abraham Flexner published his incisive critique of American medical schools in 1910, he properly issued the crucial dictum that the teaching of medicine must be founded upon a strong basis of science. Without this foundation, a physician could not possibly understand the workings and disabilities of the human body, which were being so rapidly elucidated in many European and a few American research laboratories. It was apparent to Flexner and to everyone who read his report that science is best taught in a university atmosphere.

One of Flexner's most cogent arguments for teaching science under university auspices was his concern that it would otherwise not be understood in its full context. He feared that if subjects like bacteriology and pathology were compartmentalized in order to train students specifically for medical practice, future doctors would not acquire the true appreciation of the broad range of human biology that physicians needed if they were to understand the setting in which their patients became ill. "Both subjects," wrote Flexner, "are, indeed, full-grown biological sciences,—university subjects, capable of cultivation only in special laboratories, closely affiliated with general biology and chemistry."

Flexner cared not only about what he called "curative medicine," but also about prevention, which he believed to be possible only with a keen knowledge of the conditions in which disease arises. In an almost lyrical passage, he presented his idealized image of an educational experience from which "emerges the young physician, equipped with sound views as to the nature, causation, spread, prevention, and cure of disease, and with an exalted conception of his own duty to promote social conditions that conduce to physical well-being."

Flexner was using *exalted* not in today's ironic sense of exaggerated, but quite precisely, to mean lofty or sublime. The same ideas had been expressed by the social reformer and pathologist Rudolf Virchow in the nineteenth century; they would be among the foundation stones used by Milton Winternitz to build the Institute of Human Relations at Yale, which I wrote about in the last issue of the SCHOLAR. Flexner thus recognized that

> the practitioner deals with facts of two categories. Chemistry, physics, biology enable him to apprehend one set; he needs a different apperceptive and appreciative apparatus to deal with other, more subtle elements. Specific preparation is in this direction much more difficult; one must rely for the requisite insight and sympathy on a varied and enlarging cultural experience. Such enlargement of the physician's horizon is otherwise important, for scientific progress has greatly modified his ethical responsibility. . . . It goes without saying that this type of doctor is first of all an educated man.

This brief passage was the only part of

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Flexner's 346-page report in which he made any mention of the "varied and enlarging cultural experience" that he considered so important to the education of physicians. His few words on the subject were forgotten in the well-justified rush to implement his outpouring of critical recommendations. Influenced by Flexner's report, medical schools sought close affiliations with hospitals, full-time faculty members began to replace teachers who had divided their time between the school and their lucrative private practices, and—most important to the entire scheme's success—medical teaching became fully established on the firm foundation of university-based science. Moreover, research contributions became a prime criterion in recruiting new faculty.

The Flexner Report, as it became known, outlined the steps that would raise American medical education to world leadership. Among the consequences of the report was the creation of an atmosphere for research and clinical excellence that made the United States preeminent not only in biomedical discovery but also in the treatment of disease. The growth of American university medical centers has been one of the most remarkable phenomena in the history of science and education. These citadels of medicine are civic enterprises unto themselves—scientific, economic, and social enterprises that have, over the years, taken on or been beset by such a wide range of challenges that they are now fraught with as many problems as solutions.

Too often forgotten today is the simple fact that all the vastness and chaotic intellectual ferment of the modern academic medical center have grown out of attempts to teach individual students how to care for the sick. Yet more often than not, the pedagogical mission of our schools has been lost in the thicket of undertakings that now consume the faculty and staff. The mood of unrelenting growth of the three decades since the 1960s is epitomized in a single sentence from a newsletter recently sent to faculty members at one giant institution that is widely recognized as among the nation's finest. The dean of this medical school announced an innovation: "This spring we created the new position of deputy dean for education, formally placing the teaching mission on a par with research and clinical affairs."

And high time, wouldn't you say? No doubt the school's action reflected a belated recognition of a situation spawned by the tumultuous atmosphere in which researchers and clinicians make headlong leaps toward ever-greater achievements. But one wonders whether the dean appreciated the irony of his announcement. In essence he was admitting that the stupendous growth of the other areas in which his institution is involved had subverted the school's basic purpose.

He also implied something more: that until now, no leader of his institution had considered the oversight of its primary mission—education—to be an especially important function, at least as compared with the oversight of research and clinical affairs. This surprising omission has been facilitated by a premise well known to anyone involved with the extraordinary young people now studying at American medical schools: *Put them in close proximity to excellent scientific clinicians and researchers and they will learn, willy-nilly, how to be excellent scientific clinicians and researchers—even when there is little or no formal teaching.* They do learn, by a sort of on-the-job training. But what students are not likely to acquire from the technologically minded men and women who nowadays represent the majority of the faculty of our best medical schools is the Flexnerian "different apperceptive and appreciative apparatus to deal with other, more subtle elements," specifically those elements that require "a varied and enlarging cultural experience." That "enlargement of the physician's horizon," as Flexner nicely put it, "is much more difficult."

By insisting that a doctor should first of all be "an educated man," Flexner meant that those treating the sick must commit themselves to caring for the whole man or woman, not just his or her pathology. The true healer should have a wide knowledge of the culture in which he and his patients live, and a deep understanding of the many varieties of the human condition. Though they can undoubtedly obtain some of this awareness at the bedside, today's doctors-in-training will greatly expand and enrich their limited interactions with patients if they come to them armed with a liberal education and a background in humanistic thought. It is not too much to ask that a physician's learning should encompass an

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overview of the entire range of our civilization's cultural development and a reasonably detailed knowledge of certain aspects of it. The wisdom of any of us is circumscribed by our relatively limited experience of life. We expand it by studying literature, history, philosophy, and the evolution and beliefs of societies not our own.

The profession's educators have on occasion shown evidence of understanding this and of trying to do something about it. Some have shouted vainly from the depths of the dense and tangled growth that is today's academic medical center. Others have formally protested within their professional organizations, demanding change. It is good to know that non-science majors are now being admitted to medical schools at the same rate as their peers who have spent four undergraduate years absorbed in laboratories and measurements; that there has been a significant increase in the number of medical schools that offer (and sometimes even require) courses in literature, ethics, and medical history; that many schools now have full-time chaplains with whom students can engage not only for counsel but also for discussion and debate; that the recent upsurge in attention to end-of-life care has served to remind many doctors of their pastoral role in guiding patients (and themselves) through the trials of death as well as the triumphs of cure.

But these efforts don't yet suffice. As long ago as 1984, the Association of American Medical Colleges published a study called "Physicians for the 21st Century," in which can be found the much overlooked recommendation that "each medical school campus have at least one full-time humanist to lead research in these areas and to act as a catalyst and liaison with other course directors to ensure that humanities materials are integrated into the curriculum." Other bodies have been making similar suggestions for at least the past four decades, to little avail. In 1989 the American College of Surgeons (yes, surgeons) devoted an entire issue of its quarterly *Bulletin* to the importance of knowledge of the humanities. The result of all the official nudging is that some schools do have "at least one full-time humanist"; but many do not. The scattered courses in humanistic studies now available in so many institutions are hardly "integrated into the curriculum," and, in any event, they are infrequently attended by any but first- and second-year students. Satisfying the demands of the science so vigorously advocated by Flexner has gone well past its required endpoint, but his comments about the importance of the "more subtle elements" are in large part neglected or given mere lip service. There is so much overkill in the teaching of basic biomedical science and clinical techniques in today's academic medical centers that little or no time remains in the curriculum for the development of the physician's wholeness, or for the recognition of each patient's uniqueness. Milton Winternitz's scornful term "doctor-technician" seems to have become the apparent ideal of medical training.

It's long past time to reverse the process by which the teaching of healing became the teaching of biomedicine. Like other wars, turf wars for the student's time and attention are won by those with the most powerful armaments and the most committed soldiers and leaders. As things now stand, the case for humanistic studies cannot be effectively argued at meetings of curriculum committees; nor can any battles be won by individual advocates, no matter how high their level of passion or how clearly right their cause. What's required in any school is a fully equipped army with a dedicated general staff to counteract the forceful encroachments of those who now overwhelm the four-year schedule with science and technology. By this I mean that it is no longer enough to make pious recommendations about the place of the humanities in the curriculum. Radical action is required. Only by creating a fully staffed and well-funded department of humanities in medicine will a school fulfill the proclaimed commitment of such bodies as the Association of American Medical Colleges and the American College of Surgeons.

The creation of such a unit would go beyond teaching and research. It would be a statement and symbol of the importance that medical educators attach to the development of complete physicians. The presence of a strong department of medical humanities would tell students that mastering genetics,

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molecular biology, or neurosurgery is not considered a greater good than learning to be a real doctor. It behooves foundations and funding agencies to see the value in such endeavors, and to commit resources of as much as $10 million (or more) per school to change a situation that so many foundations and agencies have decried. When the Department of Medical Humanities of my alma mater is as powerful and highly regarded as its Department of Pathology, we will be turning out the kinds of physicians that Flexner and Winternitz—and, more than a century ago, Virchow—dreamed of.

Ten million dollars is a lot. Multiply it by our nation's 124 medical schools and it becomes a practical impossibility. Nor am I foolish enough to think that my proposal will necessarily achieve its intended purpose. Certain pitfalls are easy to see, and as in all enormous undertakings, there will be others that cannot yet be imagined. But should any so-disposed foundation directors or philanthropic billionaires be reading this, my suggestion would be to choose three to five schools of different types, and to begin by establishing humanities departments at those institutions, in a sense as pilot projects. If they prove successful, similar programs might be introduced elsewhere.

Two years ago the editor of this publication, Anne Fadiman, published a notable book titled *The Spirit Catches You and You Fall Down.* It describes a cultural clash between the values and practices of American medicine and those of newly arrived Laotian immigrants of the Hmong tribe. At the center of the story is a young girl who is seriously damaged by a series of misunderstandings about a course of treatment for epilepsy. The doctors involved could not have been better trained or better intentioned. As Fadiman put it, they were excellent physicians but imperfect healers. I don't know how to make doctors perfect, but at least we can provide them with an education that will help them to heal, not merely to cure.

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JOURNAL

Flatlands

THOMAS MALLON

At twenty-six, midway through the "malaise" of Jimmy Carter's presidency, I took my first teaching job, as a visiting assistant professor of English at Texas Tech University in Lubbock. Given the state of the academic market, I was fortunate to get it; but at the time, with my eastern upbringing, secret ambitions, and new Harvard Ph.D., I felt like the unluckiest Jim imaginable. Though "culture shock" was becoming a much-overused term, it certainly seemed applicable to the disorienting blend of Larry McMurtry and David Lodge that was now my life. I had a number of good students, but they don't make many appearances in the journal I kept; twenty years later I blush for my snobbery.

I arrived, never before having seen the city or university, a couple of weeks before classes began.

August 15, 1978. As the taxi heads "downtown," I'm struck by a flatness so absolute as to be unreal: the dusty ground is relieved only by patches of exhausted grass.

August 19. When you walk along the sides of the roads—plenty of them don't have sidewalks—people in cars sometimes stop, asking if you need a lift. They're just puzzled by the sight of anyone not in a car.

August 24. I at last make my mission to the trumpet player next door, after he has half-hit one high note too many, and after he has played the half-time version of "Black Magic Woman" for about the fortieth time. He turns out to be friendly about it. He's a transfer student from Lubbock Christian College whose main goal now is to make the Texas Tech marching band, which he refers to as "the big time." We work out a practicing schedule, and he goes looking for his mute.

August 30. In the morning, before going to the office, I have to stop at the bank, and at the Buster Hanks men's store to buy a tie for the faculty meeting in the afternoon. There is no tie in the two suitcases I continue to live out of, and not being sure of the customs of the country, I decided that I ought to wear one just in case. Going out the door, I'm told by the salesman: "Y'all come back; I've got your suit size." (Meaning, by Lubbock standards, extra small and scrawny.)

September 4. On the way to a movie I slipped down a gravel-splashed incline near one of the apartment complexes near the shopping center. I cut up my forearms and nearly blacked out. This is the way I discover what must be the only hill in Lubbock.

September 13. K., a football player the size of an apartment house, comes to the office in the afternoon holding his composition like a dog holding a dead bird who's beginning to realize he's done something wrong. Here is a fellow who really wants to learn, has had his few brains miseducated in Texas public schools, and is treated like a circus animal by the coaches for a scholarship worth a few hundred dollars a semester. How can it be worth it? He lives in the "football dorm" and says, "I've got this roommate who's a real big linebacker. God, I thought *I* was dumb till I met him. He's a P.E. major. He watches a lot of television."

Everyone in the department is a scholar engaged in some kind of research. The building is like a club for people interested in books. But does our teaching have any relation to our

Thomas Mallon's novels include *Henry and Clara*, *Dewey Defeats Truman*, and the forthcoming *Two Moons*. His study of diaries, first published in 1984, is *A Book of One's Own*.

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other work? Those two activities take place at such different levels they seem without any connection, other than that they both somehow involve words. I sometimes think it would make as much sense if we hired ourselves out as housepainters in the mornings, and came to do our own work in the afternoons.

September 15. Ali is fighting Spinks on the television. The old man of style against the ugly street rat. And the old man won. It will give Norman Mailer things to say for a month.

September 19. A very nice letter from Dick Ellmann came in the morning. He says he's sent a letter for my Harvard [placement] dossier that will do me "no harm." Because of my last letter, he says, he's been asking people at Oxford if they've ever had chicken-fried steak.

September 23. [A visit to the Ranching Heritage Center across the highway from my apartment.] You move in a progression of time and prosperity, from mid-nineteenth-century cabin to early twentieth-century Victorian-styled mansion—complete with a widow's walk, no doubt for sighting the dead washed up on the shores of Deaf Smith County. Talk about the seacoast of Bohemia!

September 29. As I walk into my 7:30 A.M. freshman composition class, I hear one girl tell her neighbor: "I jes' can't believe the Pope died *agin.*"

We at last get paid. Out of $1,388 they deducted—the Federal government and the retirement people—$391. I almost wanted to run out and join the Proposition 13 people, or sign up for Reagan.

October 6. I knew something was wrong when I opened my eyes and saw sunlight. I had turned the alarm off—I missed my 7:30 class. I cursed myself in the shower and raced to school expecting to be fired. The chairman was nice about it, but I wonder what he was really thinking. When I came out of his office, Norma [his secretary] said that I looked "lower than a snake's belly."

October 10. The *PMLA* came yesterday. Each year the words and paragraphs become more abstract and more lengthy—and say less. As for style—well, they might be exercises in the grotesque. An article on Emma Bovary's "autoscopic" vision.

After class O. comes by to talk about his paper. He's like so many of them—he's 22, is married with one kid and another on the way, holds down a full- or nearly full-time job and is registered in four courses. Is it any wonder they don't really learn much? How do they even survive?

October 12. M. comes in for an appointment today and talks to me in his almost impenetrable West Texas accent. He lives in a little town miles away—Lubbock is the city to him. His "daddy" is 38, a farmer. They are broke, and M. has an unfocused anger toward the whole world because he's had to work at one thing or another since he was ten. He wants to change everything and get a job as an accountant. Then, he says, his life will be "peaches and cream."

October 22. Around seven o'clock I decide I ought to go mail a bundle of job applications. I start out and it is pleasant, still clear and sunny. But by the time I turn west on University Avenue I notice that, very quickly, part of the sky is turning brown. Cars' headlights are beginning to come on. The wind is picking up. And the dust is beginning to blow. In a few moments it's like being at the beach in the middle of a storm without rain. For a few minutes I duck into the doorway of a store. A Mexican kid comes along and smiles, and we walk together for about a block. He tells me that in the spring it will be worse.

October 26. The sophomores, as a whole, are singing along now. I've "got" them. Attention is paid, the books get read, questions get answered, *thought* is taking place. Connections, even, from book to book are being made. I think by the time the semester is over I will be able, after all, to chalk up one pedagogic success.

But the freshmen!

November 10. Office hours: you drag them in with "See me" on their papers, but they just want to yessir you and flee.

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November 11. [The loser of the local congressional race appeared to have no political future.] Another walk downtown in the gray morning. I at last bring the bike Mary gave me to a repair shop on 19th Street and then I walk more of the grim streets—George Bush Jr.'s handsome, defeated face looking out from the colored billboard in the rain.

November 14. [I was getting few nibbles on my job applications.] The dread comes when I get back to the apartment. There is nothing in the mailbox except a telephone bill and a notice that I owe the Commonwealth of Massachusetts three dollars and ninety-four cents in back taxes.

November 23. Thanksgiving at the Unitarian Church. The minister reads the Mayflower Compact and we sit down to eat. They are a remarkable group, these Lubbock Unitarians. Inside their little schoolhouse there is a mural with Christ, Socrates, Gandhi, and Buddha—and a poster with a Fellini quotation. At dinner there is talk of Tibetan bells. And, still, these free-thinkers have adopted the protective coloration of the area—frosted and teased hair, polyester, "thank *yews,*" and Instamatics. I found this strange combination very appealing.

November 24. They've discovered hundreds more bodies in Jonestown—lying under the hundreds they'd already discovered. They follow the prophet into the wilderness, and he tells them to drink poisoned Kool-Aid. That was the way and the life.

November 27. I give them back their outlines and paragraphs. After class I console B., whose introductory paragraph consisted of four "sentences," three of which were fragments. I have learned to give F's.

November 28. One of the three good ole boys from Hamlin, Texas, in my 9:30 class tells me that his cousin married the younger brother of the patrolman Lee Oswald shot while running away from the book depository. So I've now touched the crime of the century.

December 1. Some of them are so lazy that you forget there are others who actually do worry. But *most* of them are lazy. When I asked one if his paper hadn't actually been written in fifteen minutes, he said, "Closer to five." In class earlier this week I asked them to define "verbiage" (they never use the dictionary). I said, "What word does it sound like? A word I sometimes write on your papers." (I was looking for "verbose.") One kid smiled and asked: "Garbage?"

December 2. Before we go to a movie, Julie and I drive out to the Strip to purchase liquor at Cecil's—outside the city limits and at the edge of the earth. There is nothing but a flat line of land covered by the enormous sky—except, in the distance, a power plant's spikes. The winds drive the clouds into long thin lines that could be confused with skywriting. On the way back to 63rd Street we pass billboards advising us to "Whoa down!"

December 7. Sandra is one of those I have tremendous respect for—she's raising an infant daughter, working 30 hours a week at an auto parts place, and making B's in most of her courses.

December 18. To the office for conferences: I talk to A., who plagiarized unconsciously and whose tears dripped her mascara down her face despite my attempts to comfort her, and to B., who plagiarized deliberately and went out smiling. Example of dialogue:

"What does 'unmitigated' mean, Mr. B.?"

"How is it used?"

"You used it, Mr. B."

December 21. [A nighttime final exam.] At 7:00 H. helps me carry the stacks of papers and blue books back to the English Building. It's dark now, and the campus is lit with its 15,000 Christmas lights; all the Spanish arches and roof peaks outlined in the colored dots under the huge sky look beautiful and good-willed. Mary, Paul, Betsey [other younger faculty], and I go out for dinner and drinks. Mary tells us how she was reprimanded by someone for telling people at a meeting that a third of the freshman class was "on probation." The representative of the Registrar's office corrected her: "They are not on probation; they're on *probationary status.*"

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January 1. Disco Teng. The news shows pictures of the "normalization" parties at the embassies in Peking and Washington. Still Mao-jacketed (but one suspects not for much longer), the diplomatic functionaries boogied happily to the *Saturday Night Fever* score. "Self-realization" and Chungking chapters of EST can't be far away. Their revolution may really be decomposing. If only something could start the self-destruction of the even grimmer mass of spiritual misery that is Russia.

January 11. My student evaluations. One likes me because I was "humerous." Another was surprised at how much "grammer" he learnt. One of them—the farmboy from Cooper, I'm sure—said he liked me but that there was "no way on God's green earth" he was going to make more than a C–. *Green* earth? Where?

January 18. After dinner the Whitsitts come by and we go over to the Municipal Auditorium to hear Phyllis Schlafly debate the Equal Rights Amendment with Karen DeCrow, who used to be head of the National Organization for Women. There is a huge crowd, overwhelmingly against. (In the parking lot you can see Church of Christ buses from towns like Snyder.) On the ticket line a man says to a friend, "If your neck ain't red, you shouldn't be here tonight." Inside, all the frightened *Redbook* readers with their plump husbands sporting their STOP ERA buttons. (In front of us is a woman—married to a man who looks like Billy Carter—holding a cookbook titled *Beef Is an Experience!*) Schlafly is the much better debater. She doesn't worry if the questions from the audience are focused. She just perceives the emotional concern of the questioner and runs with the ball. DeCrow alienates the crowd further by asking them to explain their questions. Some of these were obviously planted by the churches: you have farm men asking, in words not their own, if the ERA will encourage "alternate life styles" (i.e., homosexuality). And of course there is the one charming good ole boy who addresses a question "to both of you very provocative ladies." More heat than light, as they say, but it was exciting—like being on the frontier debating the Fourteenth Amendment. We sat in the balcony and furiously applauded all the pro points. Phyllis, incidentally, to her eternal credit, said she was *against* slavery. She ended the debate by emerging from behind the lectern in her form-fitting (and it is a remarkably pleasing 57-year-old form) peach dress, black purse in hand, and giving a demure little girl's wave to the crowd. Thousands went back to Snyder and Floydada pleased with their champion. Even if she *is* a woman.

January 20. An interview on the radio with a waitress from Denny's. She said: "I sure hope the Shah comes to Lubbock, 'cause all the famous people who come through Lubbock stop here, and I sure would like to meet him." The Iranian royal family is taking refuge here, since the Prince is taking a flight training course at Reese Air Force Base.

February 13. A meeting in the department about the still calamitous heating and cooling system. What we learn is that essentially they're trying to do a half-million-dollar job with $9,400.

February 19. Graded short-answer tests in the evening. Favorite answer: the kid who fills in the blank to say that the Loisels, in De Maupassant's "The Necklace," live not on the rue des *Martyrs* but on the rue des *Moines.*

February 20. The news had Carter's speech at Georgia Tech on: in his robes, he tried to dispel the impression of weakness that surrounds him ever since the collapse of Iran. No one ever says exactly what he could or should have done to "save the Shah," but they accuse him anyway. Camp David has collapsed on him, inflation is horrible, SALT is stalled, and he looks bad for 1980. Oliphant, the cartoonist, continues to draw him as a little boy in his first suit.

February 22. When both my classes on Tuesday and Thursday are over, I go racing to the Dr. Pepper machines, whose ubiquitous churning can be heard all day in the English Building. My enthusiasm for office hours is not what it used to be. I suppose doctors also get bored dispensing the same advice; instead of telling them to quit smoking and do some exercise, I tell them to watch their commas and firm up their paragraphs.

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February 23. [An early-morning phone call from Vassar.] I'm offered the tenure track job. I'm flooded with happiness. I fall into my beanbag chair, put headphones and music on, and feel glorious. Then I jump up, shower, and race toward school to spread my news. All at once I am a lame duck, a crown prince.

February 28. A couple of weeks ago part of the library roof collapsed. No one was injured. (That about sums it up.)

March 5. A visiting deconstructionist lecturer takes some perfectly sensible points about Beckett and blows them up with a helium of jargon to grotesque proportions. It was a performance after a sociologist's own heart. Afterward there was one of those excruciating question-and-answer sessions with everyone untenured or insufficiently promoted trying to look good.

March 7. S. came to office hours—I had failed his last paper. It was less than half the required length and said that Cheever's character was damned unless he turned to Christ—he would "perish in the fire." When I told him that this was not literary analysis, he wanted to know if I had accepted the Lord Jesus Christ as my savior; why I didn't assign works like *The Hiding Place* and *The Cross and the Switchblade*; why we read works with foul language; and so on. He left a tract on my chair before leaving. We spent the better part of an hour talking about the purposes of a secular university, separation of church and state, the need to listen to more viewpoints than one, and so on. He left with the same look of contemptuous superiority he had on when he came in. I spoke to the chairman about this afterward. He said he was sure I handled it correctly and that, in fact, he feels sure God was using me as his sensitive instrument in helping to temper the fire in a fanatic. We laughed over this.

March 23. The wind is blowing, but not so furiously as yesterday. Wendell [a professor in the office next door to mine] tells me this is the day his brother has to castrate, brand, and vaccinate the cattle on his ranch.

April 14. [A visit to the Cotton Club, where Elvis and Buddy Holly once played, to hear Tommy Hancock and the Supernatural Family Band.] We ride out on the Slaton highway past grain elevators and the smell of feedlots, pay the $3.33 cover charge, get our hands stamped, and go in. Mary taught me—and I stumbled through—the Cotton-Eyed Joe. During the John Paul the men hold hands and dance a circle around the women, who hold hands. Then the music stops and each man dances with the woman he's wound up opposite—the circles have been going in different directions. At one point I wound up with a big lady in red pants and Betsey wound up with a beer-bellied man who owns a flower shop in Abernathy and whose wife looks like Margaret Dumont. He says to Betsey, "Honey, I'm gonna git you twice!" And he did.

May 3. To the office to grade the short-answer parts of the test. Fill-ins. One of the sophomores fails to remember "We are not saints, but at least we have kept our *appointment,*" and puts down, "but at least we have kept our *virginity.*"

Margaret Thatcher is Britain's new prime minister. The Reaganites over here are probably happy, but I doubt it's much of a portent.

May 7. In the afternoon I got a phone call from James Raimes at Oxford University Press asking me if I'd be interested in working on a book for them about diaries. I cannot believe this is happening; it seems far too good to be true. But if it is, it changes everything. It might even convince me I'm a writer.

May 15. I am presented with a rubber chicken as a final token of appreciation, and as I head for the boarding ramp they all break into "Happy Trails." The last thing I see before the plane takes off is a jackrabbit running across a field near the runway.

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• B O O K S •

REREADING

A Small Note About *Big Red*

BRIAN DOYLE

It was 1966, and I was ten years old, when I read the boys' novel *Big Red* for the first time. A much-publicized new edition of the book had come out that year, twenty-one years after the first edition, and five years after a popular Disney movie adaptation had taken peculiar license with the plot, unaccountably adding French-Canadian accents. *Big Red* was given to me as a Christmas present by one of my two uncles, a reserved and exclusively urban man who had very probably never set foot in a forest in his life, let alone plumbed the sort of dense woods in which *Big Red* is set.

I read *Red* mostly on the floor, sprawled on a golden carpet lit by fat bars of sunlight, and mostly on late afternoons, often with snacks in hand and dribbling over pages, for I remember the last light of wintry days bending into the room, and the crunch of cracker crumbs between pages when the book was ordered closed by my parents herding their progeny to dinner. Three decades later I reread the book, and again digested it while supine, but this time sans crackers and in bed late at night: a middle-aged man's time to himself, the day's labors and laughters concluded. Near me now on second read were not ingots of winter light but a wife and three children, all asleep, not a one interested in the sylvan perambulations of seventeen-year-old Danny Pickett and the big red Irish setter that was the love of his life.

The man who created Danny and his dog was a former trapper and surveyor named Jim Kjelgaard. *Big Red* was Kjelgaard's third book for Holiday House, which had asked him in 1941 to try a boys' book, after being impressed by his outdoor stories in magazines. Kjelgaard's first two books for Holiday, *Forest Patrol* and *Rebel Siege,* had sold modestly, but *Big Red* took off running—225,000 copies by 1956, the Disney movie in 1961, nearly a million copies sold in the book's first fifty years—and it is still in print, most recently by Bantam Books. Red and Danny were so popular that Kjelgaard wrote about them again in *Irish Red* (1951) and *Outlaw Red* (1953), which nominally star Red's sons Mike and Sean, respectively, but are really about the same subtle subjects that pervade *Big Red:* the mysterious, dangerous, entrancingly remote deep woods of the Allegheny Mountains in the early twentieth century; the wild animals of those woods and the ways that they live and die; Danny's precocious maturity, independence, and knowledge of the woods and their denizens; the behavior, conduct, training, and use of hunting and show dogs; and the many ways in which men and dogs respect and love each other.

James Arthur Kjelgaard wrote forty-six books, all told, before he died in 1959 at age forty-eight. Nearly all his books were for teenagers and about animals, and they are all well written, clear, and suspenseful, but it is *Big Red* that is Kjelgaard's primary literary legacy, and

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reading through it and its two sequels again after three decades has been an edifying pleasure. I learned many things that I had not noticed when I was ten years old, sprawled on the floor gobbling crackers.

I noticed that Kjelgaard tries hard to explain the story as a whole by talking again and again about how breeding dogs for certain skills and appearances is a valorous and virtuous thing (this line of talk explains the presence of Red's owner, the millionaire dog breeder Mr. Haggin, played by the dapper Walter Pidgeon in the Disney movie); but I also noticed that Kjelgaard's heart is in hunting, not bloodlines, and scenes set at a dog show in New York City ring false. They are too civilized, too much set pieces placed on the stage to illustrate the virtue of dog breeding, and they have none of the muddy excitement of the rest of the books, in which all the action takes place in the woods.

I also noticed that another repeated theme is Danny's speedy maturation. In *Big Red,* Danny comes to love Red intensely and so is brought to the realization that his career will be running traplines in the deep forest, not raising hunting and show dogs; by the end of the book, in which he and Red together battle and defeat a relentless wolverine and a monstrous bear, he has become a thoughtful and purposeful young man, planning for his future. In the second book, *Irish Red,* Danny slowly takes the pole position in the family from his father, Ross; in many ways the book chronicles Danny's rise to full manhood, both in the woods, where he and Mike escape a cougar and save Ross from freezing to death, and on Haggin's estate, where he and Mike prove Irish setters the best bird dogs by beating back a challenge from a cruel trainer and his English (horrors!) setters. By the third book, *Outlaw Red,* Danny is himself the authority figure to a new character, a backwoods boy euphoniously named Billy Dash, who is in many ways Danny Pickett again—a shy native woodsman who loves dogs inarticulately, and loves Sean especially, and wishes desperately that there might be a way for him to own Sean. Such an outcome would not be possible in the normal order of things, Billy being a kennel boy and Sean a show champion, but the end of *Outlaw Red,* much like the end of *Big Red,* finds boy and dog miraculously bound by mutual love and by Mr. Haggin's wise generosity.

A middle-aged man does not read a boy's book the same way he did as a boy. Where once I whipped through the books as fast as I could to find out what would happen, now I paused and pondered, and reread passages, and contemplated Kjelgaard at work. I noticed, for example, that there are virtually no women in the books; the only woman who appears for more than a couple of sentences is a greedy, self-centered virago who tries to steal Red in the first book. (Two substantive females do play key roles in the trilogy, but they are canine: Sheilah MacGuire, Red's mate, and Penelope of Killarney, called Penny, Sean's mate. Poor Mike remains a bachelor throughout his book, never even sniffing the possibility of love.) And I spent a lot of time contemplating Mr. Haggin, who is a sort of beneficent forest God, owning everything, adjudicating disputes, magisterially giving Red to Danny and Sean to Billy. Someone could write a wonderfully obscure essay about the theology of *Big Red.*

In rereading, I also caught, here and there in vaguely remembered passages, tantalizing glimpses of myself at age ten. The man I am now, for example, realized that Danny's intimacy with the ways of the woods was something I had yearned for almost desperately as a boy, in my world of aluminum siding and asphalt and station wagons. Such a yearning had a lot to do, perhaps, with the coonskin cap and Davy Crockett and Daniel Boone craze of my early boyhood and with my membership in the Boy Scouts, an organization that sets out to teach its troops elemental woodcraft, as well as thrift, reverence, and other things. Certainly in 1966, when I gobbled up the *Red* books, there were far fewer Danny Picketts in the American woods, and many fewer American woods, too, than there had been forty years before, when Kjelgaard was himself a teenager watching marten chase squirrels through the Allegheny beech woods.

The general loss of woods and woodcraft may explain some of the enduring popularity of the *Red* books. I think that many young people—perhaps most young people—crave what wilderness they can find, if only rabbits among tract houses, or starlings in attics, or pigeons in

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ghettos, because youth is drawn intrinsically to the mystery of the natural world, the unregulated relentless procession of it, the life and death that unfold without adult supervision. That natural inclination may be more pronounced in an American youth because the lore and literature and history of this nation have so much of the outdoors in them: the deerslayers and primeval peoples of the eastern woods, the sod-busters and cowboys and horse warriors of the plains and arid lands, the mountain men of the Rockies, the salmon tribes and loggers of the vast northwest fir forests. And that inclination may be still more pronounced because what young people hear from every front these days is demise and loss—of forests, animals, ozone layers, ways of life. A boy on the edge of manhood, itching to be independent, soaked in stories of the woods and trails, interested as a matter of course in animals since he was an infant, frightened and saddened by the loss of much of the natural world—is it any wonder that he might read *Big Red* avidly, so that for a time he would be Danny Pickett, woodswise, walking silently through the forest, knowing the ways and manners of lynx, cougars, wolverines, marten, fishers? Half a century after Jim Kjelgaard invented Danny Pickett and set him to shambling through the woods in the opening lines of *Big Red,* those wild animals are shadows and rumors in the Allegheny beech forests where Kjelgaard walked as a boy, but the *Red* books sell as briskly as ever.

What I noticed above all in rereading *Red* was that it is more about animals in the woods than anything else, including maturing boys and show dogs, and this made me very interested in Kjelgaard the man. Here is a professional writer who diligently sets and follows plotlines, but who also talks with true love about traplines, and is at his most colorful and passionate when he talks about the terrific speed of a pine marten chasing a squirrel, or the battle habits of huge black bears, or the breeding seasons of red foxes ("my favorite animal, I think," he wrote to a friend late in life). How came this man, at age thirty-four, to be writing so knowledgeably about such matters?

Born in 1910, in New York City, son of a physician, fourth of six children, Kjelgaard was, as he wrote in 1951 in an autobiographical sketch for *The Junior Book of Authors,* "not yet out of three-cornered pants" when the family moved to a farm in the Pennsylvania mountains. "My father owned or acquired about 750 acres of land, which was stocked with cattle, horses, sheep, dogs, chickens, and everything else. Eventually our father sold the farm and we moved to Galeton, Pennsylvania [also in the Allegheny Mountains]. . . . Between intervals of attending school we ran trap lines, shot deer, and fished for trout." At age eighteen Kjelgaard enrolled at Syracuse University and lasted two years, after which he held a dozen jobs, and at one time or another was a laborer, teamster, factory worker, plumber's apprentice, and surveyor's assistant. "I started writing," he explained, "because things seemed just naturally to be heading in that direction anyhow."

A lovely last sentence, that one, funny and seemingly ingenuous; but the litany of jobs reveals a man unsure of his career, much like young Danny Pickett in *Big Red.* Perhaps Danny the young trapper and woodsman, uncertain about what to do in life, came directly from Jim Kjelgaard in the same predicament in the same woods just before the Depression. It is interesting to note in this regard that Kjelgaard's first book, *Forest Patrol,* is about a young man in the Allegheny woods trying to decide what to do with his life; he decides to try for forest ranger school, training Kjelgaard knew well, for his brother John had become a ranger.

Kjelgaard had a trapper's familiarity with *Mustelidae,* the carnivore family that features weasels at the small end; valuable furbearers such as mink, otter, marten, and fisher in the middle; and the king of the northern woods, the wolverine, at the top of the line. The clever, powerful, fearless wolverine is a fascinating creature (it figures prominently in the myths and lore of northern peoples; it has been known to attack and kill moose that outweigh it by nearly a ton; even grizzly bears and cougars cede kills to it; and it was and is renowned among trappers and hunters for robbing traplines and breaking into hunters' cabins for food), and an especially violent one plays a key role in *Big Red.* But Kjelgaard brings the whole *Mustelidae* family to the table in the three *Red* books, spending many pages explaining their lives and detailing how Danny

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sets traps for weasels (he nails fresh chicken heads to tree trunks and sets traps below, knowing that the weasels, hungry or not, will be drawn to blood) and mink and otter (water traps, carefully de-scented). As for the marten, Kjelgaard uses this rare arboreal creature to describe trapper ethics; Danny spots two marten while fishing in the mountains, but he decides not to trap them, as they are apparently the only pair in the region. Danny's is a far-sighted economic decision: leaving the marten to flourish might yield a steady supply in subsequent years. But I think, too, that Kjelgaard was a conservationist and wanted to show his audience of postwar teenage boys that no trapping could be good trapping.

Much of the fascination of the *Red* books, for me, was and is their casual knowledge about these and other mysterious mammals of the woods. For a boy like me, growing up in suburban New York, where wilderness was sparse and the only unmapped places were the miles of rippling dunes along Long Island's Atlantic shore, Ross's offhand mention (in *Big Red*) of "the fisher cat we pulled spitting out of a cave last year" was entrancing. The phrase reeked of independence, woodcraft, an easy familiarity with the most elusive creatures of the North American forests. The chances of my actually seeing a marten in the thin woods near me were nil, but there was something in me that wanted very much to be able to know what such a creature was like. I wanted to understand its life among the high branches and to recognize it instantly—as Danny does when he looks up into the beech branches and notes a terrified squirrel fleeing from a lithe brown animal, fully as agile and treewise as the squirrel, its silky coat glistening in the sun.

Rereading *Red,* I realized that I owe a debt to Kjelgaard: he set me on a path toward other writers, many of them superb. Entranced by his knowledge of the woods and its creatures, I turned first to other books about mustelids, like Gavin Maxwell's fine *Ring of Bright Water* and Henry Williamson's *Tarka the Otter* (both about otters, and the latter, interestingly, T. E. Lawrence's favorite book); Kenneth Grahame's *The Wind in the Willows,* featuring Badger and an army of villainous weasels; and Cameron Langford's *The Winter of the Fisher.* From there I journeyed into such popular naturalists as Edwin Way Teale, Charlton Ogburn, Hal Borland, and Roger Tory Peterson. As the years went on, I developed a natural bent toward the many excellent writers in whose works animals are integral or central: John Burroughs, Gilbert White, John Muir, Henry Beston, T. H. White, John Baker, Rachel Carson, John McPhee, Annie Dillard, Barry Lopez (in whose work there are many wolverines), John and Frank Craighead, Ann Zwinger, Peter Matthiessen, Terry Tempest Williams, Richard Nelson, William deBuys, Robert Michael Pyle, and dozens more. And from those writers I went further into the context of animals—books about landscape, zoology, geology, ornithology, paleontology. Not only have I thus been introduced to some of the most imaginative and interesting American literature ever written, but those writers and their books have also led in part to my own interests as a man and as a writer. For this delightful education I must thank, before all other writers, the laborer, teamster, factory worker, plumber's apprentice, and surveyor's assistant who started writing because things seemed just naturally to be heading in that direction anyhow.

Even as I acknowledge my debt, I am bound to confess that Kjelgaard has many flaws as a writer. His characters are simple at best and cartoons at worst. It could be argued, successfully, that the Irish setters are more complete characters than any of the human beings except Danny, and that Danny is really the only fully drawn human character in the books, Ross and Mr. Haggin and Billy Dash and others serving merely as foils. And Danny is fully drawn, I suspect, only because Kjelgaard was writing about himself with rueful affection.

At his best, his books could rise to the level of *Big Red,* which is as much about Danny's rite of passage from boy to man as it is about the setters, and which features nonstop action and plot progress; at his worst, Kjelgaard cranked out stories that, read several at a time, begin to appear to be made by recipe. His range was, by evidence of his books, somewhat limited. They were very nearly all about hunting, dogs, or animals, very often a combination of the three, as in the *Big Red* trilogy, and a slew of his books starred a single wild animal: a beaver, a fox, a bobcat, a deer, a moose, a polar bear, a coyote.

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But it could just as easily be said that the man knew his talents better than most and rode those talents hard and well. Kjelgaard was also a serious student of history who wrote *The Explorations of Père Marquette, The Story of Geronimo, The Coming of the Mormons,* and *We Were There at the Oklahoma Land Run,* as well as books about prehistoric man, Australian aborigines, the American frontier, and the Oregon Trail.

Kjelgaard was a writer whose books nearly always featured an engaging animal, a colorful person, and a distinctive habitat, as Karen Hoyle noted in *Twentieth-Century Children's Writers.* And it would be a sniffy critic who could not admire Kjelgaard for his intimate knowledge of the woods and its animals, for writing about them without sentimentality and portentous symbolism, and for his ability to rivet adolescents with his prose. Those virtues, especially that elusive last one, which can spark a lifetime of reading, are nothing to sneer at.

Reading a masterpiece like Barry Lopez's *Arctic Dreams* after reading the *Red* books is like encountering a bear in the deep woods after setting out from a clearing filled with chittering squirrels, but the large blessing is a cousin to the smaller one, and each is a bit of grace. So as I shuffle happily through many books, and through the deep fir and cedar forests of the Pacific Northwest, I often think with affection of Kjelgaard and imagine him late on a fall afternoon in his beloved Allegheny beech woods, walking with the shuffling, loose-kneed gait of the born woodsman that he bestowed upon Danny at the very beginning of *Big Red.*

With Kjelgaard in my mind are his dogs, Irish setters of course, snuffling after rabbits, bedeviling woodchucks that barely haul their fat autumn selves into their holes as the dogs snap at their heels. The sun is splattering down between the branches of the trees. Perhaps two dead grouse are swinging at the man's belt and his rifle is carried loosely in his arm as he heads for home and dinner, roast grouse over rice, and after dinner a stiff cup of coffee and a couple of hours writing up the way a bobcat over north of the mountain doubled back through a laurel thicket to fool the dogs, which are at the moment snuffling themselves to sleep in front of the fire.

Tomorrow morning, maybe he will hike out to the pond and watch for mink and otter, and then in the afternoon work some on the book about a red fox. But right now the sun is low and the day is done and the woods are filled with stories.

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Was the historical Jesus (not Jesus as mediated through Christian interpretation) a transcendentalist or an empiricist? A finalist or a fortuitist? The seemingly unchallengeable answer given by Christians since earliest times is that he was a transcendentalist/finalist, based on confidence that he looked to God and even to natural law for moral guidance, because he believed that God is the ultimate being, the first cause, and that God rules a kingdom which mankind is invited to enjoy forever. But does this depict the real Jesus or does it merely reflect the transcendentalist/finalist orientation of his followers? In the Greco-Roman world in which Jesus lived, almost the only exception to transcendentalism/finalism of some sort was the philosophy founded by Epicurus, a materialist who hypothesized that minute, indivisible particles constitute everything—light, heat, bodies, mind, soul, thoughts—and interact in specific ways. By chance they collide, become involved in agglomerates, and develop subgroups that pattern similar agglomerates: thus accounting for indeterminacy in the physical universe and its organisms. Epicurean ethics were based on viewing human beings as having evolved over many generations from an early existence as rugged, naked brutes without fire, who, through reason and control of will, began to stay together as mates for comfort and care of offspring; then discovered the use of fire, skins to wear, huts, and language. Eventually men and women learned to make compacts with neighbors not to harm one another. Hence, agreements for mutual tranquillity are the foundation of justice; nothing is a virtue that does not serve this end. In short, Epicureanism is the ancient equivalent of scientific humanism. But because its ethic was not derived from authority beyond man (transcendentalist), instead from utilitarian interaction, Cicero derided it; rabbis anathematized it; and the first Christian philosopher, Justin Martyr, singled it out from all other philosophies as worthless—a danger to civilization.

The 113 sayings attributed to Jesus in the recently discovered *Gospel of Thomas* show remarkable congruity with Epicureanism and decided incongruity with Jewish, Christian, and Gnostic doctrines. What is the origin of *Thomas?* Since it lacks reference to messiahship, God, demons, crucifixion, resurrection, or miracles, it is hardly a Christian or Gnostic creation; nor can one imagine Epicureans composing it. Many of its sayings are similar to those found in the four gospels of the canonical New Testament, but in a form likely closer to an original (more primitive); accordingly, the whole collection of sayings plausibly predates the four gospels. Perhaps, therefore, the incipit of the *Gospel of Thomas* can be taken literally. It states: "These are enigmatic sayings which Jesus spoke while living and which Didymus Judas Thomas wrote down." In other words, someone has recognized the collection as notes taken by the disciple Thomas of things that puzzled him as he traveled about with Jesus—this means we finally have a source that gives unadulterated teachings of Jesus! Supporting the incipit's claim is the fact that the themes and subject matter of the sayings correspond chronologically with the essential movements and activities of Jesus that underlie the probably best (though extensively redacted) historical narrative we have: the *Gospel of Mark* expanded with the recently discovered *Secret Gospel of Mark.*

A student's raw notes would be in chronological sequence. The very enigmatic character of the sayings fits with the stated motivation of another contemporaneous student who took notes (Arrian's of Epictetus): to refresh one's memory for further consideration at leisure. Some sayings undoubtedly struck Thomas as extraordinary and some as obscure.

In his book *You Will Not Taste Death: Jesus and Epicureanism,* Jack Hannah presents each saying of the *Gospel of Thomas,* showing relationships with Markan passages and with Epicurean sayings and principles. Hannah argues that Jesus was deeply influenced by Epicureanism and employed it covertly in a message designed not so much to draw Jews away from their faith as to direct them to a new way to look at life. Of course in contrast to the Judeo-Christian tradition Jesus' ethic is not transcendental, not authoritarian. Its Epicurean orientation with respect to death is modified by his unique concept of a kingdom of heaven that exists not because of God (god is not needed) but because of human ability to construct and project it mentally. He probably derived this concept from Epicurean theory of how human beings make ethereal gods.

This book, ISBN 0–9670053–0–2, has 321 pages, pbk., $12 postpaid. Order with check from **FRANK PUBLISHING,** 1816 Springmill Road, Mansfield, OH 44903–8907.

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Not Like Candy

ADAM KIRSCH

How to Read a Poem
And Fall in Love With Poetry
By Edward Hirsch. Harcourt, Brace. $23.

The Sounds of Poetry: A Brief Guide
By Robert Pinsky. Farrar, Straus and Giroux. $16.

Do too few people read poetry? Judging by the mood in the small world of American poetry today, it appears that the answer is yes: maybe never before has the art seemed as marginalized, as irrelevant, as it does now. By almost any index—sales, readership, currency, influence—poetry ranks below any other literary genre, and far below the truly popular entertainments of film and television. In recent years, in response to this fear of obsolescence, those with an interest (most often altruistic, not commercial) in poetry's success—publishers, writers, teachers, promoters—have launched one outreach effort after another: National Poetry Month; Poet Laureate Robert Pinsky's Favorite Poem Project to record citizens reading poems; the American Poetry and Literacy Project, which distributes books of poems in hotel rooms and public places; and the Poetry in Motion project, which posts poems in subway cars. It is in this context that we must understand a pair of new books, one by Robert Pinsky and the other by Edward Hirsch, that attempt to win converts for the cause.

But all this activity—which, like a fever, seems to betray an illness within poetry itself—threatens to distract from the more important question about poetry. For in order to decide that too few people read poetry, one must already have some notion of how many people *ought* to be reading it. And this question is not one of strategy or tactics, but one about the nature of poetry itself; it is an aesthetic and critical question. It requires that we think first about what it means for poetry to thrive, what it means for a poem to succeed, and whether sales or readership can serve as true indicators of success.

It seems to me that the anxiety about poetry's readership today stems from a wrong, or inadequate, frame of historical reference. A new book by, say, Derek Walcott or Seamus Heaney probably sells fewer copies than a book by Tennyson would have a hundred and fifty years ago; and it is to the halcyon nineteenth century that we usually look in our comparisons about the health of poetry. But Heaney and Walcott almost certainly have more readers for their new books than did Wordsworth or Keats; and many more than did Spenser or Chaucer, Catullus or Horace, Villon or Dante during their lifetimes. In simple numerical terms, indeed, more people probably read and have access to poetry today than at any other time in history.

Of course, we instinctively feel that these comparisons are not right; changes in technology and population have made our own period incommensurable with earlier ones. But if that is the case, then what we are measuring when we try to gauge poetry's health is not simply readership, or even readership as a proportion of the population; it is something more like centrality. When Spenser's poems were read by the courtiers of Queen Elizabeth I, or when Horace's poems were passed around in manuscript among the patricians of Rome, they were reaching an intellectual and social elite that could establish their prestige and guarantee

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their preservation. These poets reached the people who "mattered." Their true legacy, their eternal fame, came only after their death, and despite tremendous social and linguistic changes; it was the centrality of their work in their own day that gave it the power to survive into ours.

The lesson, then, is not that books of poetry should simply be thrown in vast quantities at the public; it is that a book should reach the right people, its real audience. This is not so hard to accept in the case of Augustan Rome or Elizabethan London; but when the terms are translated to contemporary America, it seems an intolerably undemocratic notion. What is the group that poetry should reach today, and whom can it safely write off? Is not such a distinction by its nature elitist, and therefore unacceptable?

But here we come to another question about poetry that goes unasked in the furor of publicity. What if poetry, by its very nature and definition, is not a popular art and never can be? What if poetry is not something that can simply be given away, like television, but is more like painting or classical music, for which some degree of understanding and taste must be acquired? In that case, poetry would be fundamentally nondemocratic. But it does not then follow that poetry is antidemocratic. For the "elite" group—better, the reading audience that claims poetry for its own—is a self-selecting one, open to anyone regardless of birth or status, and more so now than ever before. Poetry, we might say, calls out to its audience; many are called, but few choose to be chosen.

Poetry, then, cannot be advertised like soap: it makes no sense to insist to any group of readers that they will like poetry, and even less to insist that they should. The famous phrase of William Carlos Williams—that men "die every day for the lack of what is found" in poetry—is a flattering conceit, but it goes too far; most people live long enough without it. And yet, despite this, lyric poetry has been in continuous existence in one or another European language since the Greeks invented it in the seventh century B.C. And this suggests that poetry does answer a fundamental human need, one even more basic than that addressed by the novel, a much more recent literary form. The process by which poetry finds its audience is quieter, and less amenable to manipulation, than the way that mass entertainments are sold; but it seems safe to say that, in each generation, there will be people who want to read it and people who need to write it. (It is perhaps another sign of poetry's current unhealthy state that this ratio is approaching one to one—that is, the audience for new books of poetry is largely composed of people who write their own poems.) That silent relationship, almost a contract between poet and reader, can best be guaranteed not by making poetry ubiquitous but by making it good: that is, likely to engage the most sensitive and thoughtful readers of the time, the people who read serious works of fiction, history, or philosophy. In the deepest sense, poetry survives only by being written well.

It follows from this that poetry is not well served by calling it something other than what it is. For instance, if a poet claims in a book intended for a general audience that poetry "seeks to mesmerize time"; that "the deepest spirit of poetry is awe"; that we read it because we want "to be surprised, to be stunned"; that a poem "engages us in something deeper than intellect and emotion" and is, in fact, a "sacred mystery" and "an archaic knowledge," he is bound to be met with some awfully disappointed readers. Yet all these claims, and some even more hyperbolic, are made by the English professor and award-winning poet Edward Hirsch in his book *How to Read a Poem And Fall in Love With Poetry*, which is less an instruction manual than an extended rhapsody.

Now it is possible that all of the above claims are true, in a very metaphorical or poetic sense: after long acquaintance with poetry, it may be possible to understand how it is in some important sense stunning or sacred. But Hirsch's book is evidently intended not for such seasoned readers, who won't need the many examples of close reading that make up the bulk of the book, but for those who are new to the art. And it is hard to see how even a willing neophyte will be able to make any connection between Hirsch's rhetoric and his or her own experience when confronted with even an indisputably beautiful poem.

For what is it, exactly, that happens when we

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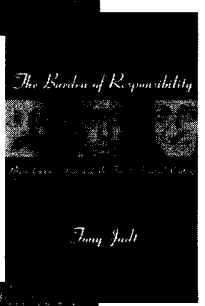

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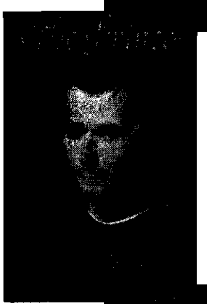

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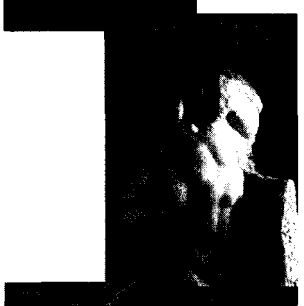

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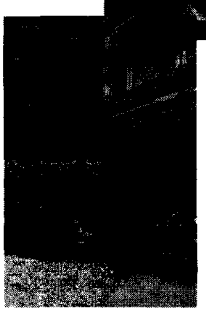

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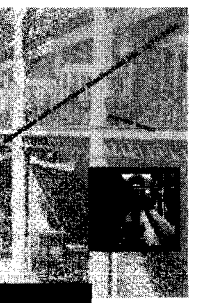

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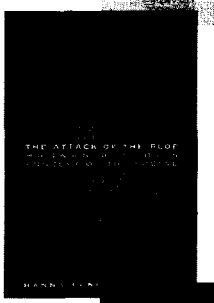

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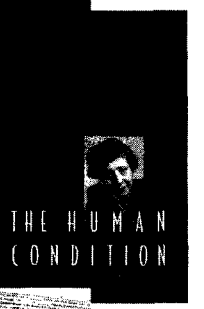

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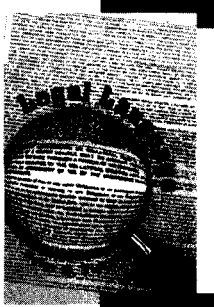

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read such a poem? For instance, Shakespeare's Sonnet 17:

> Who will believe my verse in time to come,
> If it were fill'd with your most high deserts?
> Though yet, Heaven knows, it is but as a tomb
> Which hides your life, and shows not half
> your parts.
> If I could write the beauty of your eyes,
> And in fresh numbers number all your graces,
> The age to come would say, this poet lies,
> Such heavenly touches ne'er touch'd earthly
> faces.
> So should my papers, yellow'd with their age,
> Be scorn'd, like old men of less truth than
> tongue;
> And your true rights be term'd a poet's rage,
> And stretched metre of an antique song:
> But were some child of yours alive that time,
> You should live twice;—in it, and in my rhyme.

This is a wonderful poem, but to say that it fills us with "awe" or "sacred mystery" gives no clue as to why. The sonnet does not seize us by the lapels and shake us, or derange our minds like some sort of hallucinogen. On the contrary, it stands at first aloof, demanding that we approach it; its pleasures are not immediate and sensual but abstract and literary. Just a cursory glance suggests some of its features: the conceit of the poem as a tomb, which both extends and inverts the ancient trope of the poem as a monument; the quick wordplay of "in fresh numbers number"; the magnificent, primal line "And stretched metre of an antique song," with its entwining of Latinate and Anglo-Saxon words. But to glean these things requires some preparation: an ability to hear the movement of the lines, a sense of the etymology of English words, a pleasure in conceits and metaphors for their own sake. Poetry is not, as Hirsch often seems to make it, like candy, an immediate childish pleasure (Emily Dickinson, for instance, "needed a daily dose of the ecstasy poetry provides"); it is more like the ambiguous and acquired tastes of adulthood, such as alcohol or coffee.

For the basic misconception of *How to Read a Poem* is that it scants the verbal and literary in favor of the emotional and psychological. Hirsch himself, of course, knows and appreciates those former elements: when he dissects a villanelle by Elizabeth Bishop or a set of quatrains by Emily Brontë, he is attentive to its formal aspects. But the overall tone of his book is too onrushing, too ardent-evangelistic, to lay the linguistic groundwork that a new reader of poetry requires. It is significant, in this regard, that Hirsch's examples are mainly from twentieth-century poets, and that a large number of them are in translation. This means that he can deal mainly with free verse and verse whose actual nuances an American reader will never know—poems by Hungarians, Turks, Poles, Chileans. He can pay more attention to plot, situation, and message—the paraphrasable elements of poetry—than to the verbal and musical qualities that make each poem what it is. Indeed, his only chapter on form, which comes toward the end of the book, discusses an African-American work song and an ode by Pablo Neruda: hardly the best examples to use in explaining "how to read a poem."

As a result, when Hirsch thinks about reading a poem, he envisions it above all as a personal conversation between poet and reader, a "message in a bottle." And he sees such conversations as successful in proportion to their emotional temperatures. Thus he defends Cavafy against the charge of being too "literary," insisting that he has "an intense emotional heat"; he points to the "great deal of rage" in Derek Walcott's work; he hears Keats's "beseeching, agonized, infuriated voice." The focus is all on intensity, sincerity. Obviously this approach cannot do justice to, say, Pope, or even Milton. But it is also true that Cavafy, Walcott, and Keats are slighted by it—slighted *as artists*. For poetry approaches emotions only at an angle, hypothetically: a truly infuriated or enraged person does not sit down at a writing desk, he goes out and beats someone up. In poetry, emotions are put into the solution of language and thereby cease to be emotions; they become another thing, that is, representations, or art. Part of the taste for poetry is the taste for this abstraction and not-quite-sincerity. Hirsch does not give the reader a sense of this, the essential playfulness of all poetry, even the most impassioned.

Robert Pinsky's primer, *The Sounds of Poetry*, is a far better introduction for the novice reader; it shuns false advertisement and assumes an already committed, if inexperienced, student. Pinsky is also alive to the basic redun-

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dancy of a book such as this one: it is unlikely that anyone who doesn't already like poetry will read it, and it is unlikely that a person who likes poetry would be so ignorant of its methods as to need such an introduction. (The exception, of course, is a beginning student, and *The Sounds of Poetry* would be an ideal textbook in any introductory English course.) Pinsky overcomes this problem by making his book, quite overtly, a systematization of what any reader already implicitly knows. In this, he fits in nicely with the current trend in linguistics toward description rather than prescription; writing that "we do not need to be taught such things: if they were taught in school, we would find them hard and make a mess of them," Pinsky echoes a linguist like Steven Pinker. And in the case of poetry, this approach works well, since it is of course true that the formal elements of poetry are not doctrinaire and applied but necessary and organic.

Pinsky divides his subject into five parts: accent and quantity; syntax and line; meter (characteristically, this chapter is called "Technical Terms and Vocal Realities," implicitly favoring the latter); rhyme; and free verse. The material is not difficult, and the chief thing in presenting it is to avoid hyperbole and error—and this Pinsky does, infallibly. If there is any personal "take" on the subject, it is Pinsky's emphasis on the pleasure of conflict in each of the areas he marks out: between line and sentence, stress and pitch, rhyme and assonance, Latinate and Anglo-Saxon vocabulary. This is an excellent way to bring out poetry's artificial and formal aspects, illustrating, as Hirsch does not, that one cannot fully enjoy poetry unless one enjoys such deliberate and superfluous patterning. (A corollary of this difference between the two books is that Pinsky, unlike Hirsch, uses only poems written in English as examples, and prefers rhymed and metrical poems to free verse.)

Indeed, the only part of *The Sounds of Poetry* with which one might quarrel is the last chapter, which discusses free verse in contrast to blank verse. Pinsky's aim is to show that even free verse has a pattern, that "the flirting with iambic rhythms" is detectable beneath an apparent formlessness. And while this is true of good free verse, it remains to be asked why, if free verse is interesting in proportion to its use of meter, formal verse would not always be better. A more important question is whether free verse is not doomed to overexplicitness and even didacticism, since there is no established meter to deflect the usual course of the poet's thoughts; but this is outside Pinsky's brief.

It may be that a guide like Pinsky's is necessary in teaching poetry today, but if so, it is a sign of a lamentable decline in literacy. For there is nothing about the sound of most poems that an attentive and practiced reader shouldn't be able to pick up after a few readings. (Pinsky himself admits this, saying that "if one is asked for a good book about traditional metrics, a good answer is: *The Collected Poems of William Butler Yeats.*") Despite all the propagandizing on poetry's behalf, that is the way a love of poetry always has been and always will be ignited: by a solitary reader's unpremeditated encounter with a poem and his or her willingness to submit to its peculiar demands. Like every art, poetry awakens the very need that only it can supply.

Shuffle and Deal

OF FLIES, MICE, AND MEN

By François Jacob. Translated by Giselle Weiss. Harvard University Press. $24.

Reviewed by AARON E. HIRSH

In June of 1953, at the Cold Spring Harbor Symposium where Jim Watson described his discoveries about the structure of DNA, François Jacob attended a talk of somewhat lesser significance. It concerned a peculiar bacterial strain, *E. coli* Hfr, which engaged in conjugation—the bacterial version of sex—with surprising frequency. After the meeting, Jacob bought a Waring blender for his wife and returned to Paris. A few years later both *E. coli* Hfr and the blender were ensconced in Jacob's

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laboratory. "My wife was completely disgusted with this instrument," remarked Jacob in retrospect. So Jacob and his collaborator, Elie Wollman, tried using the spurned appliance to separate mating bacteria. It worked perfectly. By sundering the conjugal bugs at various times during mating, Jacob and Wollman were able to determine that the male transferred a complete copy of its genome like one long piece of spaghetti. The implications of the notorious "coitus interruptus" experiment and the resulting "spaghetti hypothesis" were clear: by carefully monitoring the time at which each trait was transferred, the two researchers could determine the precise positioning of genes on the genome. In this way they plotted the first crude genomic map of a bacterium.

For the most part, *Of Flies, Mice, and Men* abjures such anecdotes of Jacob's own contributions to molecular biology, but it must be this kind of experience that Jacob has in mind when he writes of "the importance of the unpredictable," which is both the title of the opening chapter and also, whether by accident or design, an apt characterization of the book as a whole. It is indeed unpredictable that in a book putatively about the evolution of modern biology, Jacob would offer more on Daedalus and de Gaulle, and on the sweeping history of post-medieval art and science, than he does on his own discoveries, which are indisputably among the most important of twentieth-century science. In addition to the genomic map, Jacob helped to formulate the mechanism by which cells constantly monitor and regulate protein synthesis; the concept of a messenger molecule that serves as an intermediate between informational code (DNA) and active structure (proteins); and the hypothesis that the messenger sequence itself, rather than the cellular machinery that works with it, determines the nature of proteins. For his treatment of these ideas, however, one must turn to Jacob's other books, including *The Logic of Life* and *A History of Heredity*. Here he is in pursuit of broader topics, offering a synthetic world-view that blends biology with philosophy, politics, and art—all in a hundred and fifty pages.

The book's intellectual scope is matched by its protean style and hectic pace. At times a rather bohemian Jacob seems to speak in a voice low and laced with profundity, as if he were peering at us through wisps of smoke in a Latin Quarter café ("Man's need to toil on earth to earn his bread comes to the same thing as his need to reproduce himself through woman, to be born, to die, to feel each day the fear and hope of the next."). A moment later Jacob is in his lab coat, offering a distillation of the most striking results of twentieth-century developmental genetics and embryology. When the lab coat comes off, there's no telling whether it will be replaced by the tweeds of a scholar or the finer threads of a governmental policy maker.

Not surprisingly, Jacob seems most at home in the lab coat, and the puzzle that intrigues him most in this guise is the construction of complex organisms. As he points out, in science the most general questions often lead to limited answers, whereas limited questions sometimes supply very general answers. To solve his very general puzzle, therefore, he turns to genetics "to understand how a fly is built." In the early 1970s, the classical methods of fruit fly genetics (await a mutant patiently, then breed it creatively) converged with the novel techniques of genetic engineering, which involve direct elimination or replacement of specific genes. The result was the discovery of genes that function as developmental master switches: they reside at the top of branch-like cascades of gene activation that can precipitate the synthesis of hundreds of proteins and, ultimately, the formation of complex structures, such as eyes, legs, or abdominal sections. Aside from their disturbing consequences for mutants —the formation of eyes on wings or legs above eyes—what was most remarkable about these master switches was that they turned out to be the same genes in every organism, from flies, to mice, to men. The eye switch taken from a mouse also operates in a fly.

The question of how a fly is built, which at first seemed a question about development, thus becomes a question about evolution as well. How does evolution employ the building blocks of a fly to make a mouse? Jacob describes how genetic research on bacteria, flies, mice, and men has begun to offer an answer. When genetic sequences do differ between species, they often differ in a particular way. It is not that a sequence that is absent from one organism appears as an utterly novel invention in another, but that segments of the sequence from one organism are duplicated and rearranged in the

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other. In brief, evolution seems to involve the combinatorial shuffling of existing sequences. Jacob emphasizes that the deepest implication of these ideas was that they "underscored the degree, until then unsuspected, of kinship between living creatures."

It is surprising that, in a book of such enthusiastic historical sweep, these ideas should be framed in the context of recent research. In fact, in the middle of the nineteenth century Charles Darwin wrote that

> it is generally acknowledged that all organic beings have been formed on two great laws—Unity of Type and the Conditions of Existence. By unity of type is meant that fundamental agreement in structure which we see in organic beings of the same class, and which is quite independent of their habits of life. On my theory, unity of type is explained by unity of descent.

The biochemical characterization of the ubiquitous molecular content of cells, the discovery of a nearly universal genetic code, and, finally, the revelation of a surprising uniformity of certain sequences across a wide range of genomes compose a lineage of discoveries confirming Darwin's original intuition that vastly different organisms are united by common evolutionary descent. Natural selection proceeds by the differential reproductive success of naturally occurring variants, and this inescapably entails building on what came before. Whereas Darwin traced this process through the morphology of organisms, we now trace it at the level of the genes themselves.

If *E. coli*, flies, and mice have been biology's tiny portals to the expansive principles that organize life, then one must wonder what news the next generation of model organisms could possibly offer. Jacob's account of biology in the second half of this century confirms that the discipline has reached profound conclusions about the structures, processes, and genetic sequences that link all organisms to their distant ancestors. But if modern biology has revealed much about Darwin's concept of Unity of Type, it has said less about his converse concept, which he called Diversity of Form. Questions still surround the processes of speciation and divergence, and the nature and function of biodiversity remain surprisingly obscure. Investigations of flies, mice, and men will undoubtedly continue to astound, offering insights of broad import. But in the next decade the traditional laboratory pantheon may be joined by a host of other organisms, populations, and perhaps entire ecosystems, reflecting and compelling a shift of attention toward problems of diversity.

Synthetic critiques of science afford us the opportunity to examine rigorously the broader context of scientific investigation—its epistemological status, its philosophical ramifications, and its social impact. These areas are of course inextricably reticulate—it is impossible to adjust our view of one without transmitting tremors to the others—and within this intricate web reside countless popular myths, misconceptions, and potential misuses that must be confronted. Jacob accepts this task with enthusiasm and, it seems, the most humble and humane of intentions. Almost without exception, his aim seems to be to renounce much of the epistemological privilege of science, and to limit its social use to medical beneficence.

But the myths, misconceptions, and misuses of science can be insidious. They infiltrate our language and beliefs even as we try to expel them. With a surprising and even extreme determination, Jacob addresses the unique epistemological position that the general public accords to science. "Science imitates nature no more than does art," he writes. Elsewhere he observes that "the description of the atom seems to be as much a creation as a discovery." But the logical implications of these statements do not reverberate through the rest of Jacob's text. When he is not attending explicitly to the problem of scientific truth and certainty, dramatically different views tend to emerge.

"For the biologist," he writes, "there are two types of organism—two sorts of dogs, for example. The first, the 'familiar dog,' is the one we pet and which comes when we whistle to go for a walk. The second, the 'biological dog,' is a sort of abstract creature. Biology tells us that, of our two dogs, the true one is the molecular dog."

The view that science is an exclusive voice of truth thus infiltrates the very pages that seek to dispel it. The distance this voice carries—the breadth of its philosophical implications—is also a point of internal conflict. "There is a limit to scientific investigation," writes Jacob. "Science

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declines to answer questions like, What is the meaning of life? How did everything begin? What is our purpose on earth? Faced with such questions, science has nothing to say." Whether or not it is faced with such questions, science—even as it is presented in this very book—ineluctably says a great deal about them. Whether science is similar to art (which is, after all, about questions of just the same kind) or different from it, and whether we view the molecular dog as one possible dog or as the one true dog, our knowledge of the evolution, development, and molecular basis of the dog has affected us deeply.

It is over the social implications of science that the war is waged most dramatically between Jacob's explicit attempts to dispel misconceptions and their insidious tendency to reinvade. Jacob is adamant about the caution and restraint that must characterize the presentation of genetic results to the public: "It is important," he writes, "to clearly show the limits of genetic analysis without extrapolating it to domains for which information is still incomplete." He argues movingly that scientists are responsible for the social implications, and even the irresponsible misuse, of the data or theories they release.

But the misconceptions once again wend their way in. Whether for the sake of simplicity, ease, or dramatic effect, Jacob concludes that a wide range of phenomena are genetically determined when in fact the story is far more complicated. He attributes susceptibility to disease and the uniqueness of individuals to the genetic constitution of people or populations. However, not only do environment and culture play critical and perhaps even overwhelming roles in these phenomena; the very partitioning of causation into genetic and environmental components is itself misleading. If a given environment alters the effects of certain genes, or vice versa, how is one to divide up causation? Even when Jacob's intentions are clearly the best—as when he argues that it is genetic diversity that "gives human populations their plasticity, their ability to respond to new environmental challenges, their potential for adaptation and creation"—the arguments that he brings to bear implicitly accept the very premise that leads most directly to misuses of biology: the premise of simplistic genetic determinism.

The Real Turtle Soup

COLE PORTER: A BIOGRAPHY
By William McBrien. Knopf. $30.

Reviewed by JACOB STEIN

Movie magazines of the 1930s carried back-page advertisements offering a fifteen-dollar correspondence course on writing "hit popular songs." The financial returns that the ad implied one could pull down were clearly substantial enough to lift the possessor of song-writing secrets right off a Depression breadline. The ads caught my eye because I aspired to be a song lyricist like Lorenz Hart or Ira Gershwin or even Cole Porter. I had played Ethel Merman belting out "You're the Top" over and over on my old Brunswick record player. I had tried my hand at Cole Porter–type lyrics, and friends had told me I had talent. Even so, I had enough sense not to send the money. But I never doubted that there *were* songwriting secrets and that those in the know were churning out hits.

Thanks to biographies of Irving Berlin, George Gershwin, Vernon Duke, and other master songwriters, I later learned that there are no secrets. It's a point underlined in William McBrien's heavyweight biography of Cole Porter. McBrien, a professor of English at Hofstra University, tells us virtually all there is to know about Porter's life. But he never suggests that Porter possessed a secret formula for his hit songs.

After-the-fact stories about how hits are born are unreliable. James T. Maher, in his introduction to Alec Wilder's *American Popular Song: 1900–1950,* observes that such stories are "largely history-by-anecdote. Tales—true, false, altered, benign, malicious, witty and dull—cling to popular songs like precious gems to a reliquary." So what does a biographer do when he or she discovers that it's impossible to get at whatever it is that explains the particular genius of a writer of popular songs? What does

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a biographer do when he learns that the subject of his biography had no faith in his own ability to predict whether a song would be a hit or a flop? In most recent cases, the writer instead explores the songwriter's personal life in great detail. What turns up is generally unfavorable. Joan Peyser's biography of George Gershwin portrays the composer as a rather nasty young man with a disorderly private life. Laurence Bergreen's biography of Irving Berlin portrays Berlin as selfish, insecure, and envious of other songwriters.

McBrien wants to be good to Cole Porter. He is thorough but always discreet. This isn't easy, because the cast of characters that peopled Porter's golden life reads as if it were lifted from the most exotic pages of Marcel Proust. The names have the ring of those attending a Guermantes salon. Among them are Princess Helen of Romania; King George II of Greece; the Duc de Talleyrand; the Princess de Polignac; the Duke of Alba; Alfonso XIII, King of Spain; the Princess Mdivani; and, of course, the Duke and Duchess of Windsor.

How did the boy born in Peru, Indiana, in 1891—or 1892 or 1893; Porter offered different dates at different times—come to connect with this highest of high society crowds? Ready cash helped him gain admittance (his grandfather was a millionaire businessman; his father built a successful drugstore chain), and a talent to amuse made him perennially popular in such circles. There's little doubt, too, that Porter got from his beloved mother, Kate, a firm confidence in his own talent and an unflinching determination to set his life to his own tune.

His talent went with him from Worcester Academy to Yale and on to Harvard Law School. Along the way Porter picked up a respectable musical education. He dropped out of Harvard Law and proceeded by small steps to his ultimate destiny, the Broadway musical. He may have served in World War I, though that remains a subject of controversy, and one that McBrien cannot entirely resolve. Porter told stories of volunteering as a combat ambulance driver. After the war he wholeheartedly adopted the persona of a playboy, witty, jaded, but also, of course, very gifted. He seemed bent on proving that his droll party songs and lyrics were more than novelty items, and he did so. In 1919 his song "Old-Fashioned Garden" caught the attention of Tin Pan Alley. He also solidified his position in society that year by marrying Linda Thomas, a blueblood, an incontestable beauty, and, thanks to a staggering divorce settlement, a very wealthy woman in her own right. Linda liked jewelry, especially diamonds as big as the Ritz. Her money, Cole's family money, and the royalties that would soon begin to roll in kept the marriage on a sound financial footing. There were penthouses and villas and white-gloved servants. There were trips made in oriental splendor to London, Paris, Cairo, and Venice. There were butlers and chauffeurs and hangers-on. The marriage lasted several decades, despite the fact that Porter also pursued a series of affairs with men.

Porter and his circle reveled in conspicuous consumption. But no matter how much he relished the glittering social whirl in which he and Linda moved, Porter differed from other members of their set in at least one regard: whenever he had an offer to write a show, he jumped ship, even if it was a luxury yacht, and immured himself in his majestic apartment at Manhattan's Waldorf Towers. There, pent up in his penthouse, he would work night and day.

Porter came along at a time when American popular music was undergoing profound change. George M. Cohan had uncoupled it from bathetic ballads and European operetta, giving his songs catchy titles, up-tempo beats, and lyrics laced with the latest slang. Combined with the ragtime craze and a growing American market for songs and shows, Cohan's innovations helped convert popular music into a highly profitable industry with a product th could be exported worldwide. The indu creative and business center was New Yo where songwriters, music publisher music printers, and song pluggers g satisfy the growing appetite for m tured for a mass audience.

Irving Berlin sensed each c lic's mood. He wrote the best rags. He turned out onymous with the Ro able to shift gears ar offerings for the and Tails," pub George Gersh level of po

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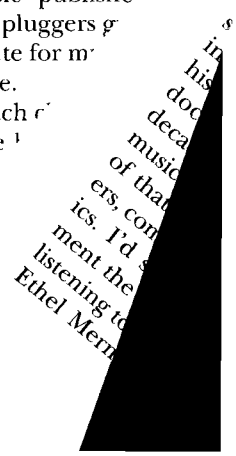

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And then Cole Porter gained on them both and won the race.

Why? In part because his knowledge of upper-class life (and upper-class superficiality) was the real turtle soup. Berlin's and Gershwin's version was—to apply a nicely turned Porter line—"only the mock." The ironic language of the upper classes was Porter's mother tongue. He knew the right brand names. He didn't mind twitting the pretensions and faux anguish of his social peers. He could also catch the confusion and soaring emotions of love with a deftness and precision that few other popular composers could begin to match.

By 1937, when he was forty-six, Porter was on top of the world. Perhaps the gods had grown envious of a man who had it all—money, talent, fame, glittering friends. Thrown from a horse, Porter suffered serious and permanent leg injuries. For the rest of his life he was rarely free from pain. He never walked again without aid—a cane, a crutch, a helping hand. Eventually he was confined to a wheelchair. Yet he continued to write witty, charming songs that ironically conveyed the anguish not of an injured man but of people who had it all, including the condiment of Weltschmerz.

McBrien falls into the trap of subjecting Porter's lyrics to hard analysis. It's a vain endeavor. Without the music, the lyrics are just light verse that, as light verse, does not get under the skin. That happens only when words and music flawlessly combine. Porter's pal Noël Coward got it right when he had one of his characters say, "Strange, how potent cheap music is."

Still, for devotees of Porter or for anyone curious about the details of his often gaudy life, McBrien's book is the ultimate source. Every show and film on which Porter worked is described, and the provenance of many songs is set forth with great care. Porter's restless traveling, his many friendships, his battles to bring shows to the stage as he imagined them are documented at length. And because for decades his work was at the heart of American musical theater, this book is perforce a history of theater and its colorful cast of producers, composers, performers, musicians, and critics. I suggest, however, that readers supplement the narrative by spending an hour or two listening to Porter songs as sung by his favorites, Merman and Fred Astaire. When asked why he admired Merman, Porter quipped that she was the missing link between Lily Pons and Mae West. Astaire's debonair, wistful style perfectly complemented Porter's lyrics.

It is a testament to Porter's peculiar genius that his songs, seemingly representative of a vanished social order, still retain their vitality and charm. While Porter the man never lost his affection for the moneyed crowd that drifted restlessly from country to country, season to season, Porter the artist saw that milieu with a sharp and jaundiced eye and wrote songs about it that were vigorous and witty enough to transcend time and place.

McBrien deals gently with Porter's sad last years: days and nights of crowds without company, dissipation without pleasure. Porter died in Santa Monica, California, on October 15, 1964. At his bedside were Stanley Musgrove, a close friend, and—a touch reminiscent of one of his songs—his two loyal valets.

Above It All

THE VIEW FROM THE TOWER: ORIGINS OF AN ANTIMODERNIST IMAGE
By Theodore Ziolkowski.
Princeton University Press. $29.95.

Reviewed by SUNIL IYENGAR

Not long into *The View from the Tower,* Theodore Ziolkowski posits a working definition of his subject: "The tower stands alone as the embodiment of pure vertical structure: its space neither contains nor functions." To erect a tower is to stake a prospect far above mere mortals; unless you're planning a lighthouse or a lookout, however, it's also plainly illogical. Claims of extravagance and irrelevance have dogged tower makers throughout history. In antiquity, for example, "the Hebrews of the tenth century [were] dumbfounded by the mas-

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sive towers of Mesopotamia." (To be fair to the Babylonians, their towers had a utilitarian side, being sites of worship and astronomy.) Similarly, Ziolkowski calls it "one of the oddities of architectural history" that "the Greeks, in accordance with their general aesthetic principles, neglected for their own purposes any structure as asymmetrical as the tower."

Any consideration of general aesthetic principles in the twentieth century must accord modernism a central place, and Ziolkowski singles out four writers—William Butler Yeats, Rainer Maria Rilke, Robinson Jeffers, and Carl Gustav Jung—as artists who chose the tower for purposes asymmetrical to their era. Of the four, Yeats brings the strongest testimony to bear on Ziolkowski's case, namely that the tower allowed writers between two world wars to contemplate the world's ruin from a rarefied perspective.

Thoor Ballylee, Yeats's tower, was severe, iconic, and utterly impractical. The recurrence of towers in Yeats's poetry—witness *The Tower* (1928) and *The Winding Stair and Other Poems* (1933)—is as celebrated as his theory of masks or, within that mode, the creation of Michael Robartes, a fictional dweller in towers. Ziolkowski's service to the reader is in supplying a sense of what went into the building of Thoor Ballylee: concrete details that connect monument to man. Yeats's tower emerges as something comparable to Jefferson's Monticello. An unfinished masterpiece, the tower consumed the poet's labors from 1916 well into the next decade. The irony of Yeats's entanglement with such mundane affairs as cottage restoration and smithy work was not lost on Ezra Pound, who in 1920 referred to that "phallic symbol on the Bogs. Ballyphallus or whatever he calls it with the river on the first floor."

In a splendid chapter on the tower's significance throughout the centuries, Ziolkowski describes the Platonic preoccupations of study and self-inquiry that Milton and Shelley ascribed to the tower in their poems—ideas that the four writers considered here would modify on their own terms. Before Yeats settled into Thoor Ballylee, his tower associations conformed to stereotype. Beginning with the writing of "The Tower" in 1925, however, the poet can be seen casting about for images not only deeply personal—"my ancestral stair"—but also outwardly speculative. Rather than use Thoor Ballylee as a facile retreat from a civil war (1922–23), Yeats made it a perch from which to identify Ireland's local character, her cultures and traditions, in one panoramic view. Though *The Tower* houses some poems of "bitterness," in Yeats's words, by the time of *The Winding Stair* he was able to endow that vista with compassion, asserting that "everything we look upon is blest." For Yeats, the view from the tower is as much about the landscape below as about self-exaltation or haughtiness.

Evidently Yeats took his time about building a tower. By contrast, sheer desperation characterizes Rilke's attempts to consummate his own "turiphilia" (Ziolkowski's word). In 1921 Rilke set his sights on the Château de Muzot, a thirteenth-century tower in Valais, Switzerland. Ever reliant on wealthy benefactors, he petitioned "a sisterlike friend" for six months' rent. His turiphilic instincts appear to have been well-founded, for shortly after installing himself in the château he experienced what Ziolkowski describes as "a three-week surge of creative energy virtually unparalleled in the history of literature," writing twenty-five of the *Sonnets to Orpheus* and completing the *Duino Elegies,* which he had been carrying in his head for ten years. Ziolkowski is certainly correct in dubbing this month a "*mensis mirabilis,*" and a reader does not wonder that "on 9 February, [Rilke] reported that he had gone outside in the cold moonlight and caressed the tower 'like a large animal' because it was these walls that had given him this new inspiration."

Ziolkowski deftly illustrates the gradual refinement of Rilke's regard for towers. In his early work, they are appreciated as scenery; later, towers come to symbolize spiritual aspiration. In one gorgeous image, Rilke speculates that "Tolstoy's relationship to death must have been a sublimely permeated fear, a fugue of fear . . . a tower of anxiety with passages and staircases and railingless ledges and precipices in every direction." By living a little closer to heaven, both Rilke and Yeats inhaled a magnanimity of outlook.

Robinson Jeffers and Carl Jung are united by an elemental bond to the stone from which their towers were hewn. Jeffers appears to have been at least partially inspired by Yeats: Hawk Tower, near Carmel, California, was modeled after Thoor Ballylee, which the American had

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visited twice in 1929. Both Jeffers and Jung acquired hands-on experience in masonry and stone splitting; both draped their towers with trappings primitive and heraldic, the result being totems to a lost culture. Jung's tower at Bollingen and its various annexes constituted a familial hearth. When residing at Bollingen, Jung wrote, "I am in the midst of my most essential being, I am most profoundly myself." Jeffers, meanwhile, perfected "the patience of stone" in tribute to a primeval past unscarred by civilization. This tendency of Jeffers, readily observed in his poems, is often termed misanthropic, and for better or for worse, Ziolkowski offers little to complicate that view. Taken at one extreme, after all, the intoxicating heights of a tower and its reductionist vantage can induce monomania. (I am reminded of *The Third Man* and Harry Lime's soliloquy atop a Ferris wheel: "Look down there. Would you really feel any pity if one of those dots stopped moving?")

In a preface, Ziolkowski proposes that his book should be read as an essay, belonging to "the mode of literary study known as thematics," whose task is "to identify the presence of a theme, motif, or image as symptomatic of a profound concern in the thought and work of an individual writer." Ziolkowski accomplishes this modest aim, and more. He demonstrates a sure grasp of the periods he discusses, offering an effortless weaving together of biography, apt quotations from the writings of his four subjects, and wonderfully relevant artwork.

What is lacking is a full justification of the book's subtitle, "Origins of an Antimodernist Image." Ziolkowski never strays outside historical data or textual analysis to distinguish his four writers and their towers from contemporary modernists. For example, it may be argued that the high modernist trend toward esotericism and inaccessibility—think of Pound's *Cantos,* or Joyce's *Ulysses,* which features, incidentally, Martello Tower—exhibits all of the hauteur ascribed to a Hawk Tower or a Thoor Ballylee.

On the other hand, Ziolkowski reminds us that "the ultimate goal" of his essay on these four individual talents is "to achieve a deeper understanding and appreciation of their works." His undeniable success in that department is what makes *The View from the Tower,* despite an anticlimactic ending, well worth the climb.

An Effervescent Thinker

ISAIAH BERLIN: A LIFE
By Michael Ignatieff.
Metropolitan Books. $30.

Reviewed by PAUL ROAZEN

This fine biography of Isaiah Berlin, who died in 1997 at the venerable age of eighty-eight, is the work of a political theorist and journalist who interviewed Berlin over the last decade of his life. A lesser biographer might have puffed up the text into twice its present length, for Berlin was a prolific writer, a mesmerizing public speaker, and a fascinating figure. As it is, Michael Ignatieff's three-hundred-page account is focused, moving, and deftly revealing of hitherto unsuspected links between Berlin's life and his writings. There is an especially touching scene toward the end of the narrative, when Berlin, about to be hospitalized for the last time, meets with his biographer to reassure himself that the book (which, it had been agreed, would appear posthumously) would not be a betrayal. Berlin was savvy enough to know that authorized biographies can, even if unintentionally, often turn on their subjects. But he had chosen wisely in his biographer.

He was also fortunate in his editors. Forty years ago, when I first read Berlin, his writings were not easy to find; his essays appeared in a variety of obscure publications. Then Henry Hardy, a philosopher who had done graduate work at a college at Oxford that Berlin had founded, began—with Berlin's encouragement—to gather his many essays into a series of collections, including *The Age of Enlightenment: The Eighteenth Century Philosophers; The Crooked Timber of Humanity: Chapters in the History of Ideas;* and *The Sense of Reality: Studies in Ideas and Their History,* making Berlin's stimulating, precise, highly original works available to a wide audience for the first time. (A final collection, *The Roots of Romanticism,* appears this

Paul Roazen's most recent book is *Canada's King: An Essay in Political Psychology.*

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spring.) Michael Ignatieff, author of a series of thoughtful, incisive reports on the nature of contemporary upheavals (*The Warrior's Honor: Ethnic War and the Modern Conscience; Blood and Belonging: Journeys into the New Nationalism*), is a fine, precise writer, deftly catching the mix of qualities that made Berlin an influential, charming, and unique figure.

During his long career as a writer and academic, Berlin crossed paths with many of the great figures of the century, ranging from Virginia Woolf and Sigmund Freud to Wittgenstein, Keynes, Weizmann, Stravinsky, and Picasso, and including many leading statesmen as well. Berlin's opinions of these people are worth heeding; his pithy sayings and anecdotes are telling. He positively bubbled over with bright, humane, often aphoristic talk, and his writings (in his late years regularly dictated) are an expression of the free flow of his mind. He had a musical capacity to hear the central melodic themes in past thinkers, which is what distinguishes his work from that of most of his contemporaries. They could be carried away by their own cleverness; Berlin always followed the thread of the ideas he was tracing, preferring to call attention to concepts rather than to his own quite remarkable mind.

For me the most moving chapters in the biography have to do with Berlin's 1945 visits to Moscow and Leningrad. My guess would be that one reason Berlin picked Michael Ignatieff as a biographer was their shared Russian background. Berlin was born in Riga, Latvia, but his family fled from Petrograd in 1920 and eventually settled in England. The four essays that Berlin wrote on the birth of the Russian intelligentsia in the 1830s and 1840s, first published in the journal *Encounter* in the 1950s under the title "A Marvelous Decade," established his credentials as an expert on Russian intellectual history. When he returned to Russia after World War II, Berlin was able to meet the modern inheritors of that great tradition, Boris Pasternak and Anna Akhmatova. Pasternak, whose relatives in Oxford knew Berlin, had not yet written *Doctor Zhivago,* but Akhmatova's poetry was already a symbol of the unconquerable

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Russian spirit. Her meetings with Berlin inspired several poems.

At times Ignatieff can seem too scrupulously discreet. This may in part have to do with the fact that his subject is so recently departed. Whatever the reason, Berlin's private life is dealt with in rather terse fashion. In his forties he fell in love with a married woman; she divorced her husband, and her subsequent marriage to Berlin, apparently a happy one, lasted more than forty years. Berlin wrote so eloquently about the painfulness and inevitability of human tragedy that it is hard not to assume that he had made some very difficult choices in his own life. Yet although Ignatieff notes that Berlin suffered several nervous collapses, he does not much explore these events. He recognizes the oddness of Berlin's "lifelong dislike of Freud," and brings it up in the context of those who wondered whether Berlin "actually read the books he cited so effortlessly." But I suspect that Berlin was deeply offended by Freud's theory of perversion and the implications it had for Oxonians of Berlin's time.

Ignatieff is right to highlight how thrilling Berlin's lectures could be. That was why he became such a popular teacher at Oxford. In 1959 he gave a lecture in the dining room of my college on Marx's great enemy Bakunin, and I rushed out to buy and read E. H. Carr's big book on Bakunin. There was less in what Carr (an enemy of Berlin's) had written than in Berlin's presentation. Some of Berlin's immediacy, though, got lost when he finally wrote up the talk for publication. When Ignatieff tells us how bored by individual tutorials Berlin could be, the reader may miss the implication this had for those who tried to study with him. This "Paganini of the platform" could be a disaster in face-to-face encounters; it was only years after I had him as a tutor that I was fortunate enough to be able to meet him on some sort of footing of adult mutuality.

Ignatieff is balanced and persuasive on the strengths of Berlin's brand of anti-utopian liberalism, stressing how much Berlin valued the idea of pluralism advanced by John Stuart Mill. He correctly draws a sharp line between Berlin's ideas and those of Herbert Marcuse and Hannah Arendt. In Berlin's eyes, Marcuse was contemptible for his Hegelian sleights of hand, a skill too often used to whitewash some of the greatest crimes of twentieth-century states. Berlin and Arendt differed about Zionism; she also suspected that Berlin had helped orchestrate the attacks on her book *Eichmann in Jerusalem.* It is certainly true that after her death he suggested that she was an overrated thinker.

Berlin was insistent that the most monstrous crimes of the twentieth century have been committed on behalf of ideas that, in the abstract, sound most attractive. Marx and Freud, he argued, were both too eager to champion a version of what Rousseau had once said was "forcing" people to be "free." Berlin stood for calling a spade a spade; he distinguished liberty from other possible values, such as justice or equality. Intellectuals who recklessly play around with ideas could end up, like Heidegger, as proponents of Hitler. Stalin had his own group of well-educated apologists. Isaiah Berlin's writings, over the course of several decades, came to symbolize the best in the British tradition of humane scholarship: balanced, analytical, acutely conscious of the influence of ideas on society. Michael Ignatieff has ably brought to life the evolution and complex, incisive nature of Berlin's agile mind. His book is an exemplary exploration of Berlin's special and lasting contribution to social and political thought.

We call to the attention of our readers the following titles, published in 1998, portions of which first appeared in THE AMERICAN SCHOLAR: *History in Our Time,* by David Cannadine (Yale); *The Birth of Empire: DeWitt Clinton and the American Experience,* by Evan Cornog (Oxford); *My German Question: Growing Up in Nazi Berlin,* by Peter Gay (Yale); *King Leopold's Ghost: A Story of Greed, Terror, and Heroism in Colonial Africa,* by Adam Hochschild (Houghton Mifflin); *A Ved Mehta Reader: The Craft of the Essay,* by Ved Mehta (Yale); and *The Book of Job,* introduction by Cynthia Ozick (Vintage Spiritual Classics).

In addition, Houghton Mifflin will soon publish *Narcissus Leaves the Pool: Familiar Essays,* by Joseph Epstein. All but one of the sixteen essays collected therein appeared originally in the SCHOLAR. Mr. Epstein, its longtime editor, wrote the former "Life and Letters" column, under the pseudonym Aristides, from 1974 to 1997.

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THE READER REPLIES

REMEMBERING ALFRED KAZIN

Alfred Kazin's loss, mourned in your Winter 1999 issue, leaves us empty. The art of literary criticism seems to be passing from our scene, and we are less interested in literature and more interested in packaging for mass consumption. Will this trend change? Kazin gave us hope that it could.

So much of value is passing from us!

ROY D. SCHICKEDANZ
Glenwood, Illinois

GHANA, 1963

In general I am as pessimistic as David Levering Lewis about the developmental future of sub-Saharan Africa. However, with regard to the 1999 condition of Abidjan, he should not have depended on Robert Kaplan's book, *The Ends of the Earth.* Kaplan was reasonably accurate about the state of crime in Abidjan in 1996. By spring 1997, when I attended a conference in Accra and had a chance to travel in Ghana and the Ivory Coast, I could see that the situation had changed. In Abidjan, money from investments and from gas and oil development was arriving. Private armies were no longer required. The city looked more prosperous than it had on my visits in the mid-seventies.

Lewis's memories of the Ghana of Nkrumah made enjoyable reading. He should return to view with amazement the changes in Accra, on the Gold Coast, and in the national park. The signs along the main road in Accra, paralleling the coast, feature churches, ministers, and religious organizations. The cultural attachments to the U.S. have grown. The country, though, is poor—not in the sense that Mali and Senegal are poor, but too poor to keep its roads repaired or its electric power source maintained. Ghana and the Ivory Coast both started their independence with money, but Ghana, then the more prosperous of the two, chose to invest in showy projects (a dam, a port, a major highway), whereas the Ivory Coast opted for agricultural development. Despite their poverty, the people of Ghana are still, as they were when Lewis met them, wonderfully outgoing, pleasant, and gentle.

PAUL GOOD
Fairfax County, Virginia

HTTP://WWW.WHEN_IS_ENOUGH_ENOUGH?.COM

Paul De Palma tentatively puts forward the thesis that computers may be responsible for the decline in manufacturing jobs since 1970, a period during which total employment has grown by fifty million.

Don't blame the computer. Manufacturing jobs as a percentage of total employment have been steadily declining since at least 1950, long before Windows was a gleam in Bill Gates's eye. Over the same period, service jobs have been steadily rising. In fact, even in 1950, the time we think of as the heyday of manufacturing, service jobs were more numerous than manufacturing jobs. Since then our reliance on the service sector has steadily grown stronger.

People who fear the future have an incentive to demonize the service economy. But the increase in service jobs is driven mainly by our choices of where we want to work. Along with hamburger flippers and retail salespeople, service employees include NBA players, doctors, lawyers, and editors of THE AMERICAN SCHOLAR. Most of us would not want to work in a factory

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or return to an economy in which manufacturing jobs are the dominant choice for our children's future employment.

De Palma is right that people often neglect to notice the time they waste getting their computers to work. But he seems to imply that this is something sinister rather than the normal evolution of a revolutionary product.

Despite our disagreements, I salute De Palma's indictment of our obsession with computer literacy. I am reminded of the looks I get when I tell people my preschool kids don't watch *Sesame Street.* Don't worry, I reassure them, my wife and I have managed to teach them the numbers and the alphabet. My kids don't know how to use a computer either. Instead, they spend their time thinking, doing puzzles, and reading. I lose no sleep worrying about the time it will take them to learn how to use a mouse or pull down a menu.

RUSSELL ROBERTS
St. Louis, Missouri

Paul De Palma's article, which decries the wastefulness of spending money on new computers and the fact that people don't understand what he does, is riddled with logical flaws. His conclusions do not stand up to casual evaluation.

"Schools and universities purchase products from the computer industry to offer training that benefits the computer industry. These purchases are both publicly subsidized through tax support and paid for by students (and their parents) themselves."

Well, schools and universities also buy products from the medical industry to offer training that benefits the medical industry. In fact, they buy products from every industry they offer training for, purely to benefit those industries, even the academic industry itself. Why do they do this? Because that is what the students and faculty want. Ask any group of faculty members not to use their university's money to buy products and services in their field. Then duck. And what's wrong with paying for that training the same way all the other fields of study in the university are paid for?

"The skill imparted is at best trivial and does not require faculty with advanced degrees in computer science—degrees acquired, by and large, through public, not computer industry, support."

Funny, I wasn't aware that the computer industry wasn't part of the public—or that it didn't pay taxes. I bet the computer industry's financial support of public educational institutions is greater than the support provided by other industries, such as entertainment, manufacturing, and retail sales.

De Palma's belief that computer skills are "trivial" must be related to his dismay that employers want to hire people who can do useful work for them as fast as possible.

I call myself a computer scientist, having received a master's degree in 1984 after taking a mix of theoretical and practical classes. But I am not an academic; I build software systems to solve real-world problems for my customers. While the languages I learned for programming computers are long gone, the underlying mathematical and logical discipline still serves me well.

BRYAN BINGHAM
Albuquerque, New Mexico

Paul De Palma's excellent essay should put microcomputers in their place.

Among my own many objections to the way computers are being used in the classroom is the elimination of the epiphany that comes with discovery. Discovery is not achieved by enabling a six-year-old to manipulate the right keys. In my own childhood, discovery was catching a tadpole in the wetlands near Ten Mile Creek and, over the course of a summer, watching the legs grow and the tail disappear and, finally, seeing a frog hop away; discovery was finding a cocoon from which a moth emerged; discovery was clouds and rain and snow and rainbows and grass and thorns stuck into thumbs and grasshoppers spitting tobacco juice.

You can learn all of the above and much, much more from the computer, but you can never experience more than virtual discovery, not real discovery in real time.

Aside from the obvious ego lift of discovery, does this really matter? The function of education, I assume, is the development of the powers of thinking, reasoning, discriminating, and any number of like gerunds. To the extent that reliance on the computer tends to displace, or

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become an adjunct to, the brain for the performance of any of these functions, the brain will, as a matter of economy, tend to diminish its independent power to perform them. What then happens when the computer is down? And above all, what potential for catastrophe might there be in learning *how* without knowing *why*?

MEL RECHTMAN
Decatur, Georgia

THE UPS AND DOWNS OF HONOR

Kudos to Eugen Weber for his vivacious and erudite essay. However, since he tried to relate some of the negative aspects of honor in both history and previous literary works to comparable negative aspects of honor in today's society, I think his essay would have been more balanced and honorable had he referred to some of honor's attractive connotations as well. In other words, he downsized the "Ups" of that semantically elusive word and "upsized" (why isn't *that* word in the dictionary?) the "Downs."

For example, when the word *honor* (and variants thereof) is used in such expressions as "Your Honor," "The Honorable Senator from Massachusetts," "With High Honors," (as in some college degrees), and "I have the high honor to present . . . ," is the word being used pejoratively?

And what did The Honorable Congressman Henry Hyde mean when he told the Senate, in his defense of impeaching our (honorable?) president, "We vote for our honor, which is the only thing we get to take with us to the grave"?

O tempora! O mores!

MILTON BIRNBAUM
Springfield, Massachusetts

Eugen Weber provides a highly readable but woefully one-sided view of "heroic" values from antiquity to the present. To be sure, considerable chest thumping survives in football, but it is counterbalanced by the values of sportsmanship and the equally heroic effort to subordinate the ego to the team.

From the beginning, the conflicted mind of man created a theater of mortals, demigods, and gods that enabled Homer and the Greek tragedians to critique the heroic ethos as well as celebrate it.

The noetic revolution wrought by Socrates and Plato counterbalanced the *timé* (honor) of the heroic period with the *areté* (virtue) as understood in light of the transcendent values of the Good, the Beautiful, and the Just.

The Israelites and Christians evolved their own version of transcendent values in contrast to the pagan and barbarian world around them. By grafting their beliefs to the Greco-Roman tradition, they produced the creative tension that is one of the primary motors of Western civilization.

In spite of its worldly ambitions, the medieval Church counterbalanced the heroic values underlying chivalry with spiritual values that resisted, as well, the excesses of secular power. Thus St. Ambrose was able to impose penance upon Theodosius the Great for the massacre of Thessalonica, and Henry II was forced to do penance over the tomb of Thomas à Becket.

Unfortunately, the modern period has done much to undermine the counterbalancing ethos of spiritual values without diminishing the influence of the old heroic values, until today the *timé* of the Devil trumps the *timé* of the Saints.

We should confront the current crisis not with the despair that Professor Weber seems to project but with a renewed commitment to the arduous task of restoring the balance.

KEN WHELAN
San Francisco, California

"The Ups and Downs of Honor" is consistent with the interesting work of such sociologists as J. G. Periestiany, who writes about notions of honor and shame in the Mediterranean, and Richard E. Nisbett and Dov Cohen, who write about similar phenomena in the American South. While these writers make valuable contributions to an understanding of the deviance and criminality they try to explain, Weber's Hobbesian argument that honor is merely a reputation for power is dangerously reductionist and represents a profound misunderstanding of Greco-Roman notions. Weber has misapprehended not only the *Iliad*, which he disparages, and Aristotle, whom he misuses, but also Montaigne, who in his own discussions of honor constantly echoes Greek and Hellenophile Romans (especially Cicero, Sen-

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eca, Tacitus, and Plutarch). Montaigne does not represent a change "from public regard to personal self-esteem," but writes directly out of the Hellenistic values Weber has been slandering; and he does not celebrate but regrets the contemporary estrangement from antique notions of honor, for which he blames the new "fourth estate of wrangling lawyers."

The conflict of the *Iliad* arises in part because Agamemnon, at least, does try to link honor to raw power, but if Achilles had been a mere "thug," he would not have pursued that honor which entailed the certainty of death, the ultimate extinction of power, when he could have stayed in Phthia and enjoyed there the power and wealth that already were abundantly his. The resolution of the poem restores the community that is the source of honor—not only the Achaean community, but the human and divine, as Achilles honors Priam, the powerless father of his enemy. Honor in the Greco-Roman tradition was a social resource awarded ideally according to the justice, wisdom, courage, and self-restraint of each person. These values are frequently explicit in the poems of Homer and Hesiod, and they are implicit on every page. Great humanists like Erasmus and Montaigne everywhere recognize and testify to this ideal: that honor nourishes virtue. While the Greeks, like everyone, too often ceded to power what was owed to virtue, they composed epic and tragic poems to remind themselves of the consequences of such failures, not essays to rationalize them.

ANTHONY LOMBARDY
Professor of Classics
Belmont University
Nashville, Tennessee

Eugen Weber replies: It is good to be read, still better to evoke reactions, including critical ones. I'll gladly plead guilty to the charge that my views are one-sided, even reductionist, when only reduction could compress them to a dozen pages. I am more dubious about confronting crises that one despairs of solving, especially after contributing to their making. As for honor nourishing virtue, one is tempted to ask whether it does not rather skirt it or ignore it, until reminded that *virtù* is simply manliness, too often brutal, sometimes thuggish.

It doesn't matter, though. My critics demonstrate that, in the study as in the streets, the sense of honor is alive and well, and ready for assertion.

ARENDT AND EICHMANN AT THE DINNER TABLE

Anthony Grafton's revival of the Arendt-Eichmann controversy urges me to record a revealing detail that I have not seen noted by those who discuss the problem. Arendt was my New York neighbor at the time and occasionally attended receptions that, as professor of Greek and Latin at Columbia, I held for visiting German classical scholars. Aware of my interest in Greek tragedy, she remarked to me at one of them that the source for her treatment of Eichmann was Helen's defense speech in Euripides' *Troades* (914–965), and Hecuba's reply. Helen is a pawn of history no more or less guilty than Hecuba, who bore Paris; than his father, Priam, who did not kill him; or than Paris himself. Hecuba, whose husband, children, and fellow Trojans have been murdered by Helen's fellow Greeks, cries out for the execution of Helen, as Israel did for that of Eichmann. Her thirst for vengeance makes her impervious to reason. Menelaus, unlike the Israeli court, allows Helen to survive, as I believe Arendt would have allowed Eichmann.

WILLIAM M. CALDER III
University of Illinois
Urbana, Illinois

THE MEDICAL SCHOOL AND THE UNIVERSITY

Sherwin Nuland's discussion of efforts to integrate medical school into the university neglects the separation that physical distance can impose—even the relatively short distance across town in New Haven, let alone the distance from Berkeley to San Francisco or Ithaca to New York.

The demise of the Institute of Human Relations that he recounts was certainly regrettable. I had read several of its publications and hoped to benefit from its interdisciplinary approach when I enrolled in the Yale anthropol-

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ogy department in 1945. Unfortunately, as Nuland observes, the Institute was by then virtually defunct. However, some anthropologists still had their offices at the medical school, and the distance between it and the faculty offices at Hillhouse and the Peabody Museum corresponded to the intellectual and personal distance between the two halves of the department.

HAROLD ORLANS
Bethesda, Maryland

ADDICTED TO VIOLENCE

In the review of books by Karen Halttunen and Sissela Bok, I am delighted to find Amy L. Blair throwing cold water on Bok's harebrained "call for schools to offer training in critical media skills" as an antidote to TV and movie violence. Bok offers this lame suggestion in an era when thousands of schoolchildren cannot read or figure—and display appalling ignorance of history and geography. Blair acutely asks why Mighty Morphin Power Rangers and their young playground imitators "arouse such anxiety in parents and educators." These latter must have swallowed, at an impressionable age, Rousseau's myths about the child's innate goodness and innocence.

Addled parents and "educators" (loathsome word): toss your volumes of Rousseau; make room on the bookshelf for Robert Ardrey. Every child, especially every boy, is born a prime candidate for the hangman's noose. He takes to edged weapons and guns as a young duckling takes to water. Weapons are older than our species. We did not become the dominant form of life on Earth by being bashful about them.

The work of civilizing boys and young men away from criminal violence begins in childhood. Beyond parents and teachers, priests and rabbis too play important roles in this work of civilization, which must begin anew with each generation of boys. And because we often fail, we need capable, well-armed police, and sometimes the National Guard. Not all violence is criminal.

Amy Blair is wrong when she writes that "the murderer is often neither a monster nor an innocent, but some combination of the two." I have observed murderers in the penitentiary. Many are monsters, and a few are crazy, but most killed deliberately and methodically. An adjective like "innocent" should be reserved for their victims.

ROBERT FAIRCHILD
Hampton, Virginia

YEA AND NAY

I liked the SCHOLAR under Hiram Haydn, under Joseph Epstein, and now under Anne Fadiman. I read nearly all of every issue. In the Winter number, I have read all the Kazin memorials and "http://www.when_is_enough_enough?.com"—all first-rate—as well as the superb piece on Loren Eiseley and the hilarious one on Laura Riding. I have a particular interest in the fate of the book, so I paid special attention to the lead review on the subject—full of interesting ideas and angles. I'll read most of the rest of the issue. Congratulations.

HERBERT S. BAILEY
Pittsboro, North Carolina

I always looked forward to receiving THE AMERICAN SCHOLAR not only because of the many fine works on its pages but because each issue made me smile. Without Joseph Epstein, it is now only a publication with many fine works on its pages.

JOHN D. GRIFFITH, M.D.
Houston, Texas

As a new member of Phi Beta Kappa, now a graduate student, I find the SCHOLAR a welcome foil to the esoteric journals that are an inherent feature of academic life. It has become one of my most happily anticipated periodicals not only because many of its articles are written by the country's most respected and articulate scholars but also because they are an interdisciplinary look at knowledge itself, and at the love of learning that has propelled us along our chosen career paths.

SABRINA BROSELOW
Greensboro, North Carolina

Please send letters to THE AMERICAN SCHOLAR, *1785 Massachusetts Avenue, N.W., Fourth Floor, Washington, D.C. 20036, or e-mail them to* scholar@pbk.org. *Letters may be edited for length and clarity.*

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The Podium

Riding Uphill Through the Jungle

TIMOTHY FOOTE

I have written a couple of books and several hundred reviews, but the truth is that for more than fifteen years, I've made most of my living as an editor. What is an editor? As a first witness, let's call Henry Adams, who briefly edited the *North American Review.* An editor, Adams wrote, is "a helpless drudge whose successes, if he makes any, belong to his writers." He goes on: "Vulgarly speaking, it was a dog's life when it did not succeed and little better when it did." That's the upside. Listen to another definition, posted in capital letters on a copydesk at *Time* by a splendid writer named Paul O'Neil. "An editor," Paul wrote, "is a personage who rides uphill through the jungle on the back of a writer, picking bananas and shooting parakeets along the way." And there is my late mother who, almost to the end, would suddenly ask, "Timothy, are you still correcting papers?" Then she had a way of adding, "Never mind. In fifty years we'll all be dead."

There is much to be said for these views, and as a sinful editor who has in his time persecuted many pieces of prose (for their own good, of course) and is now about to become a writer again, I may not be entirely disinterested in pointing them out.

Writers are what any magazine cannot live without. They work alone, and take all the risks. Knights of the empty page, they have to start from scratch on a blank sheet and create a semblance of linear order from a chaotic spaghetti of notes and recollections. It is a hundred times harder to make that first run, however badly, than it is to edit it afterward, however skillfully. What matters, finally, is neither the writer nor the editor, but the story. And while a piece of writing is being poked and pinched along inside the belly of a magazine, it is all too easy for an editor to feel ungrateful, to think of it as his, and the magazine's, creation.

—from a farewell speech delivered on January 22, 1999, in the Smithsonian Arts and Industries Building in Washington, D.C., after fifteen years as an editor of Smithsonian Magazine

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Timothy Foote, who has been a senior editor at *Time* and *Smithsonian,* is the author of a book on Peter Bruegel. He is working on an anthology, "The Poetry of Grief and Consolation."

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NARCISSUS LEAVES THE POOL

FAMILIAR ESSAYS

"Joseph Epstein . . . moves so effortlessly from the amusingly personal to the broadly philosophical that it takes a moment before you realize how far out into the intellectual cosmos you have been taken. . . . It is refreshing to hear so independent a voice." —TOM WOLFE

"Joseph Epstein's essays no more need his identifying byline than Van Gogh's paintings need his signature. Epstein's style — call it learned whimsy — is unmistakable; for Epstein addicts, indispensable." — GEORGE F. WILL

"Joseph Epstein is the liveliest, most erudite and engaging essayist we have . . . In taking his measure, he takes our own." — JAMES ATLAS

JOSEPH EPSTEIN

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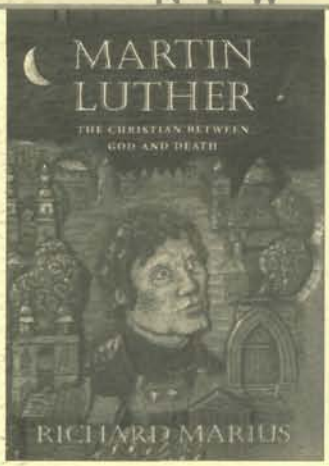

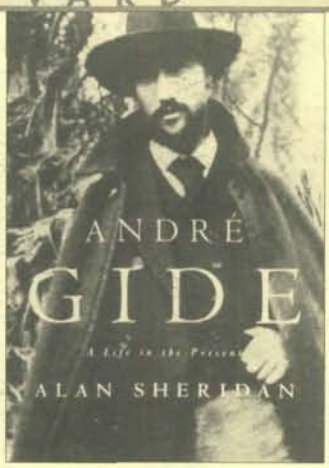

Martin Luther

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ALAN SHERIDAN

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